

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



TEENAGE KICKS: SIMON REYNOLDS ON HARMONY KORINE'S SPRING BREAKERS

PLUS

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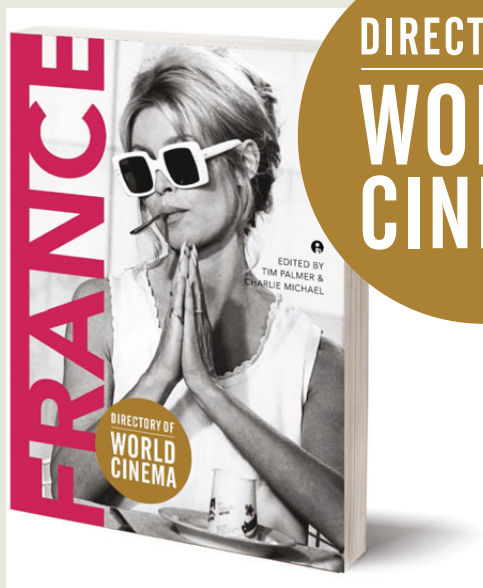
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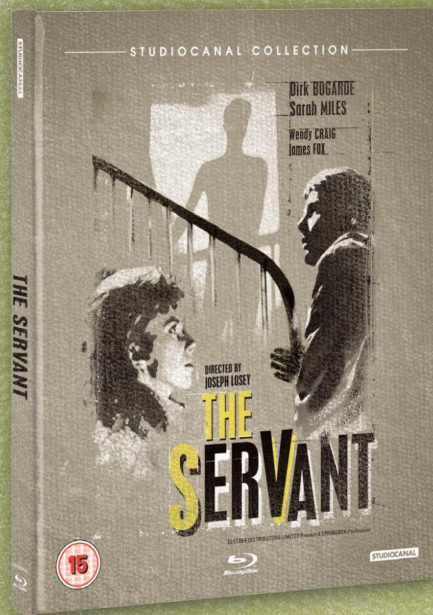


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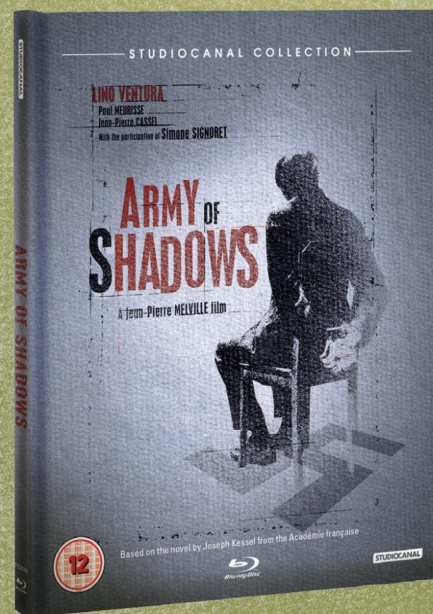
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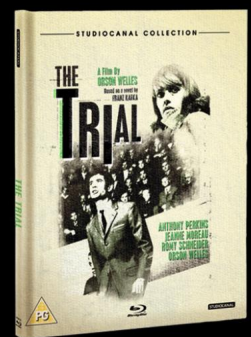
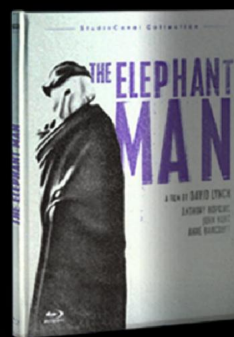
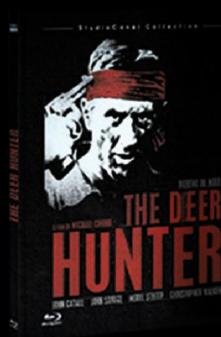
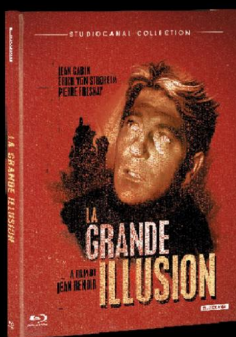


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Welcome



The above image looks pure *noir*—and indeed it's Clara Calamai in Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943), a Po-valley transplanting of James M. Cain's pulp-fiction classic *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. It's not *noir* we're celebrating in this issue, however, but neorealism, as our Deep Focus (p.56) traces the movement's antecedents in Soviet, German, French, Japanese and British cinema before its flowering in Italy immediately after World War II. Of course

neorealism wasn't so much a style as a state of mind, echoed in 1970s American cinema's commitment to real locations and the hard-pressed lives of ordinary folk: an overlooked gem of the period is Jerry Schatzberg's rereleased *Scarecrow* (p.42). But it's not all dusty roads this month: we also offer you Harmony Korine's day-glo breakthrough *Spring Breakers* (p.26), a history of the pop video (p.50) and Pedro Almodóvar on the secret of comedy (p.39). *Arriba!* **Nick James**

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ARROW  FILMS



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COVER

'Spring Breakers', retouched by DawkinsColour

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on sale 7 May

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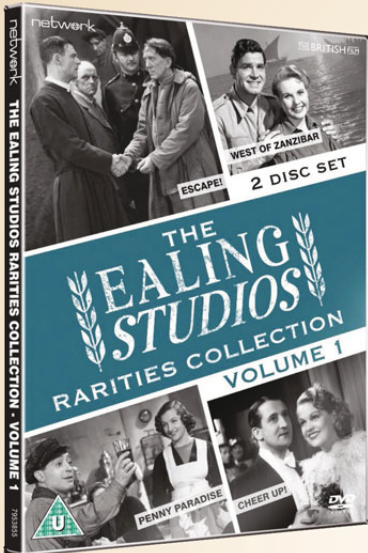


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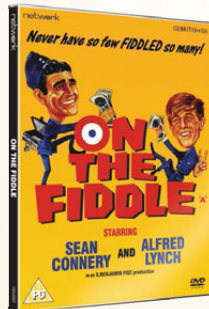
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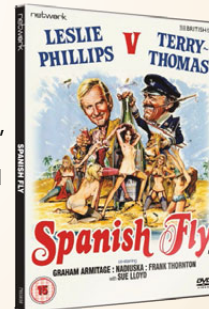
Man at the Top

The gritty 1973 film starring Kenneth Haigh as Joe Lampton; the aggressively ambitious protagonist who originated in John Braine's novel *Room at the Top*.



On the Fiddle

A year before he became Bond, Sean Connery starred in this comedy caper alongside Alfred Lynch and Stanley Holloway.



Spanish Fly

Screen icons Terry-Thomas and Leslie Phillips star in this vibrant mid-70s sex comedy set in sunny Menorca.



The House in Nightmare Park
Frankie Howerd stars in this hilarious horror spoof from *Doctor Who* and *Blake's 7* writer Terry Nation.



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An exciting tale of double-crossing and blackmail from legendary thriller author Edgar Wallace.

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Editorial Nick James



A CULTURE OF TALK

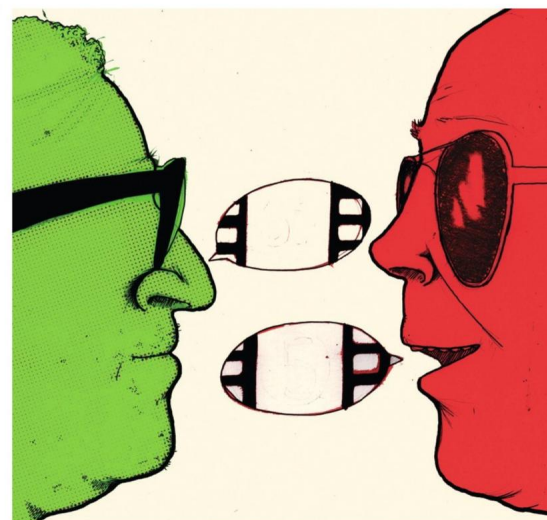
I have recently returned from Bari in Puglia, the heel of Italy, where in March what I would call a fresh wind (and the Italians a cold one) comes off the Adriatic with about two thirds the force of the extraordinary freezing easterlies we've been experiencing in the UK. I was on the jury judging Italian features at the fourth edition of BIF&ST (the Bari International Film Festival) and found myself in that rare environment in which easy discourse could take place between a jury made up entirely of critics and the many directors who came through town.

Of course, Italians love to chat, and that's infectious – even if, like me, you have no great grasp of the language. But what this young festival also has is a feeling of going back to what was once the basis of the film world – a respect for film as a culture that involves conversation between makers and critics. So there were plenty of masterclasses as well as films – and no parties, just dinners (in a town abundant with fish) and an absence of intervening publicists. The guest list was impressive, if old-school: Ettore Scola is the festival's president; Marco Bellocchio and Giuseppe Tornatore were around a lot, as were Bertrand Tavernier, Margarethe von Trotta and our own Stephen Frears. Our jury were a strong-minded bunch drawn from Munich, Barcelona, Warsaw, London and Paris, with the redoubtable Michel Ciment of *Positif* magazine as our president. And so the talk swirled like fountain water.

But why should a culture of talk seem so surprising? Partly this feeling of enhanced discourse was a by-product of the poor reception for digital services in Bari. I could not, for instance, access email or Twitter except at my hotel. Thus hardly anyone was much distracted by their palm devices. And then there is the waiting factor built into all Italian occasions, which means that, since everyone else has to finish their conversations before they take their seats, even we repressed and impatient Northern Europeans might as well do the same.

So some intriguing debates bubbled around, and the one that struck me most was an informal lunchtime chat with Stephen Frears on the subject of auteurism. Frears is famous (notorious even) for claiming as little responsibility for his successes as he can, heaping the praise on his collaborators. Without wishing to say too much about a private conversation, I can report that he made it clear that he doesn't regard

Contact between filmmakers and critics is slowly being erased from film life. But critics-turned-filmmakers were the people who first made auteurism stick



himself as an auteur. Given that he comes out of the collaborative milieu of television, perhaps that's hardly surprising, but it did mark for me a moment when I had to concede that auteurism in cinema is increasingly hard to justify as a critical approach.

Again, this concession partly grows out of an acknowledgement of technological change. Now that low-budget filmmaking is so cheap that almost anyone can do it, and it's so much easier to alter what's been shot in post-production, the notion of the individual genius at work in film has been undermined. Yet auteurism's significance has also waned because the sort of casual contact between filmmakers and critics that I've been eulogising here is slowly being erased from film life. But critics-turned-filmmakers were the people who first made auteurism stick, and conversations between the two professions sustained the culture of cinephilia once it was established.

It's probable that many filmmakers have been quietly enjoying the weakening influence of critics – and who can blame them? A harsh review written in a day can ruin two years of work by dozens of people. But without critics to give it oxygen, auteurism may not survive. And even if you are of Frears's opinion that auteurism doesn't matter, there's a way of looking at films other than as an entities of a single intelligence. Some contemporary philosophers, such as Alain Badiou, have argued that films represent the thinking process to such an extent that they can be said to 'think' themselves. The question then becomes, should critics be a part of the conversation that creates the 'thinking' film? Here I'll go out on a limb and say what I believe: that films were better when filmmakers felt themselves obliged to be part of a conversation about cinema that took account of critical thinking. **S**

IN THE FRAME

LOOK BACK WITH ANGER



Inauguration of the pleasure home: 'Icons' houses Kenneth Anger's collection of memorabilia

Arriving in London from Berlin, Kenneth Anger's exhibition 'Icons' evokes his dual roles as filmmaker and Hollywood chronicler

By Jane Giles

First seen in Berlin earlier this year, the exhibition 'Icons' features a fraction of the lifelong personal collection of movie memorabilia belonging to Kenneth Anger, legendary experimental filmmaker, pagan, pop bitch and fan boy (born 1927). Anger has curated the exhibition with humour and reverence, working across two rooms replicating the way in which the items are usually displayed in his Los Angeles home.

'Icons' demonstrates that old Hollywood has historically influenced the avant garde, and shows how a specific sensibility can connect even the most diverse of objects.

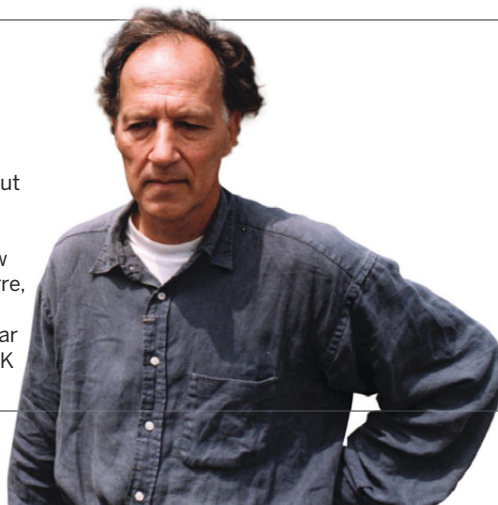
The first room is deep crimson, two vintage armchairs facing an enormous reproduction of Anger's own signature, surrounded by posters and production stills from the *Magick Lantern Cycle* films, especially *Lucifer Rising* (1970-80) and *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954). The red wall on the left is mostly devoted to Rudolph Valentino. Studio portraits of Valentino as the Sheik and Pan are framed alongside a tattered front page of the *Los Angeles Examiner* dated Friday 13 November 1925, its headline reading 'Valentino to get Paris Divorce' ('Film's greatest wooer and wife scheduled to drop shackles

of matrimony'). There's creamy embossed stationery from Valentino's Falcon Lair estate on Bella Drive, Beverly Hills, and a *Sheik* tie-in boudoir lamp proffering incense. A lobby card for Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle's 1935 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (in which Anger may or may not have appeared as a changeling) sits alongside that of D.W. Griffith's *The Fall of Babylon* (also known as *Intolerance*). A glamorous studio portrait of Anger himself has been smuggled in at the edges of his homage to Valentino.

On the right-hand red wall, a handsome portrait of *Frankenstein* director James Whale hangs next to a wolfish Rin Tin Tin, and in amongst the many images of Darryl Zanuck and friends is a full-page newspaper article from *American Weekly* dated 1922, detailing how the

Werner Herzog

A retrospective of films by the great seeker of 'ecstatic truth' plays at BFI Southbank throughout June and July this summer, with extended runs of new restorations of 'Aguirre, Wrath of God' and 'The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser' opening in UK cinemas nationwide.



Ben & Shezad's Moviedrome Presents...

Artist/filmmakers Shezad Dawood and Ben Rivers kick off a new series of personally chosen double bills at the Whitechapel Gallery on 12 May with a screening of Italian director Lucio Fulci's 1982 Egypt-set gorefest 'Manhattan Baby', plus a surprise title...



ON OUR
RADAR



The blue room

Detroit courts stripped bare the plans of “a little coterie of evil” led by bookshop manager Albert W. Ryerson, publisher of Aleister Crowley’s *The Equinox*, to establish a new religion based on the “astounding” doctrine, “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” The article is illustrated by the now famous photograph of Crowley circa 1910 in ceremonial robes making the Sign of Pan (a gesture of creative energy), with dire warnings of the trail of “wrecked lives, broken homes and business disaster” known to follow membership of his Ordo Templi Orientis.

The red walls behind the seated viewer are dedicated to the Hollywood silent film star Billie Dove, who was famously bought by Howard Hughes in 1930 when he paid her wild filmmaker husband Irvin Willat \$325,000 in thousand-dollar bills to get a divorce. Billie Dove was once as popular as Clara Bow, with a box-office pull that exceeded even that of Mary Pickford, Gloria Swanson and Greta Garbo. The singer Eleanora Fagan named herself ‘Billie Holiday’ after Dove. But her name is now little known and many of her films are lost, including the “bi-racial epic” *The Love Mart* (1927), stills of which adorn the gallery walls, along with many of Dove’s own melancholic oil paintings.

The second room is painted midnight blue, illuminated by a Hollywood Babylon neon sign in the form of a pair of open lips. One wall features publicity shots, mostly of Billie Dove, while another wraps in Dove, Greta Garbo, Valentino and an invitation for a 1985 launch party to ‘Holly Baby II’ (the second volume of Anger’s scurrilous book, produced during the hiatus in his own filmmaking). Facing this wall, a vitrine displays a range of objects, including a model of Darryl Zanuck playing croquet in his underpants,



The red room

a French first edition of *Hollywood Babylone* (to use its Gallic title), an Agnès B T-shirt featuring the occultist Marjorie Cameron as the Scarlet Woman in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), green-inked signatures in the guest book for Zanuck’s Palm Springs Estate, Valentino-inspired packaging for ‘The Sheik of Five Cent Cigars’ (mild), a Kodachrome lens, a copy of Crowley’s *The Book of the Law*, and the BFI’s own publication about Anger’s films, *Into the Pleasure Dome* (1989).

The overall effect of ‘Icons’ is of a surreal spider’s web, drawing together self-mythologising memorabilia from Anger’s own books and films with images and objects from the golden age of Hollywood, the cross-threads being his enduring fascination with the occult and his belief that “making a movie is casting a spell”. ‘Misunderstood genius’ Aleister Crowley died in 1947, the year that Anger’s filmmaking career took off with *Fireworks*. In 2000 Anger returned from cinematic silence with *The Man We Want to Hang*, a short study of Crowley’s paintings shot in situ at the October Gallery exhibition in London in 1998. Although not the greatest of Anger’s film, it will always occupy a particular significance in his oeuvre, not least as a reminder that Anger’s 1955 documentary about Crowley’s erotic frescoes of Thelema Abbey is lost, like so much of early cinema.

Perhaps even more so than cinemas, art galleries are the sacred places where cultural icons such as Anger, Crowley, Valentino and Dove can be brought together across time to create a new magick. ⑥

i ‘Kenneth Anger – Icons’ is at Sprüth Magers, London until 20 April. ‘The Magick Lantern Cycle’ is available on BFI Video

ANATOMY OF A MOVIE SPRING BREAKERS

18% *Crossroads* (2002)

16% *Mean Girls* (2004)

12% *Thuggin’ It & Lovin’ It* (2009)

11% *Windowlicker* (1999)

10% *Cities of Gold and Mirrors* (2009)

8% *Girls Gone Wild* (1999)

8% *American Apparel* advert

7% *Tree of Life* (2011)

7% *Where the Boys Are* (1960)

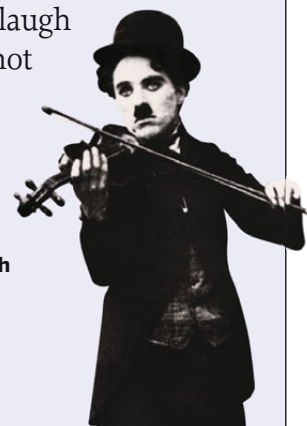
3% *Piranha* (2010)



QUOTE OF THE MONTH CHARLIE CHAPLIN

“Cruelty is a basic element in comedy... The audience recognizes it as a farce on life, and they laugh at it in order not to die from it, in order not to weep.”

Extracted from Chaplin’s 1966 interview with Richard Meryman



Billy Liar

The film that made stars of Tom Courtenay and Julie Christie marks its 50th anniversary this year. A new restoration screens at the Bradford International Film Festival on 14 April, at the British Library on 26 April, and is released on Blu-ray on 6 May.



Alan Partridge

The jump from small screen to big has often been a bumpy one for UK comedy, but the recent trailer for the upcoming Alan Partridge spin-off suggests that Steve Coogan’s most famous creation may buck the trend. ‘Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa’ is released on 16 August.



Ozu

A very special BFI members’ screening of Ozu’s 1930 gangster film ‘Walk Cheerfully’ takes place at BFI Southbank on 22 April, with a live benshi narration by Tomoko Komura and live musical accompaniment by Clive Bell. S&S’s own Tony Rayns will introduce the screening.



IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

Cinema is littered with misfits and sinners who are graced with far more knowledge of the Bible than the moralists ranged against them



By Hannah McGill

"You know, I imagine there's only one thing that's been in as many hotel rooms as I have," Sky Masterson tells Salvation Army sergeant

Sarah Brown in *Guys and Dolls* (1955), "and that's the Gideon Bible." So it is that this morally insubstantial gambler is able to correct pious Sarah's misquotation of the Good Book; and so Sky, with his physical understanding of the world as distinct from her cold, theoretical processing thereof, begins to get under the sergeant's skin. She might have the Bible logged as a set of moral rules, but he's actually read it – "at least a dozen times". And he gets her again later, after she slaps his face, with Matthew 5:39 ("Don't bother looking it up; it's the bit about the other cheek").

Sky is not the only cinematic sinner to have obtained a counter-intuitive familiarity with the word of God courtesy of the Gideons' evangelical largesse. When the amnesiac protagonist of *Memento* (2000) refers to reading motel Bibles "religiously", he's emphasising not just his own lonesome monomania, but also the film's stylistic debt to *noir* conventions. *Noir* protagonists are too cynical to fall for organised religion but too damned clever to share a room with a book without reading it through. "Don't look back, baby," says another Masterson – Van Heflin's Sam, also a confirmed Gideon aficionado – in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). "You know what happened to Lot's wife, don't you?" The mystery to be unlocked in Roy Del Ruth's *Red Light* (1949) lurks within a stolen Gideon Bible, a plot point echoed in 1996's *Mission Impossible* (perhaps unconsciously, though one might note that *MI*'s director Brian De Palma and co-screenwriter Robert Towne are no strangers to *film noir*).

The Bible knowledge of *Pulp Fiction*'s (1994) bombastic hitman Jules is less thorough than that of Sky Masterson – Quentin Tarantino is more than a little free in his adaptation of Ezekiel 25:17 – but it creates the same image that so impresses Sergeant Sarah Brown: the habitual wrong-doer possessed of a forceful religious instinct, if not a direct line to God. With study, after all, such a person might find a Bible verse to justify whatever excesses he might have undertaken in his life. Jules feels vindicated enough by the vengeful language of Ezekiel to physically enact it – just as the depraved preacher in Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), Harry Powell, assures himself of God's complicity in his murders with the words "There's plenty of killings in your book, Lord." Harry is particularly certain that God sanctions his killing of women. After he murders his wife, we find him reading aloud from Proverbs 23:27, which warns against whores and adulteresses: "A strange woman is a narrow pit." It's the fact that these commandment-breakers do know their Bibles that sets them dangerously



Angel of death: 'There's plenty of killings in your book, Lord,' says Harry in 'The Night of the Hunter'

at odds with conventionally 'Christian' values.

Also more knowledgeable about the Bible than the fastidious moralists who oppose him is Henry Drummond, the intellectual lawyer in Stanley Kramer's *Inherit the Wind* (1960). Enlisted to defend a Bible Belt teacher on trial for instructing his pupils about evolution, Drummond goes up against Fredric March's fundamentalist Christian politician – and cannot, for all his studious references to the marked-up



'Inherit the Wind'

Bible he holds in his hand, penetrate that man's stubborn acceptance of contradictions and inconsistencies in the text he chooses to regard as literally true. Yet Drummond is finally 'outed' as a believer himself, to the dismay of his friend and ally, Gene Kelly's cynical, staunchly atheist journalist. Left alone with the trial's key books – the Bible and Darwin's *The Origin of Species* – Drummond weighs them in his hands, slaps them together, and walks out holding both.

In Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Ordet*, released the same year as *The Night of the Hunter* and *Guys and Dolls*, interpretations of scripture differ so intensely within one tiny community as to create a bleak sort of comedy: a single crazed fanatic lives among agnostics, broadminded believers and the sombrely devout. When a Bible is produced, it's to keep young Anne and Anders occupied while their fathers, adherents of differing faiths, discuss whether they can wed. Just as Harry Powell, violently appalled by his own sexual urges, forces Willa to pray hers away, the couple in *Ordet* are physically parted by the Bible staunchly manned by Anne's mother. Markedly selecting a story of life being bestowed



It's the fact that these sinners do know their Bibles that sets them dangerously at odds with conventionally 'Christian' values

asexually – as well as prefiguring the film's own coming miraculous revival – she calms them with the story of Lazarus's resurrection. When Anders seeks an opportunity to get closer to his beloved, showing her an illustration, they're slapped apart. The presence of the big Bible and its stern interpreter expresses the weight of parental control on the pair's lives, as well as the incompatibility of the hatred of original sin with the power of the sexual impulse and the necessity of reproduction. It's the sexually fulfilled, happily pregnant Inger who is almost sacrificed – and who does lose her child – when the two families cannot marry their beliefs, and who is saved when they reconcile. This eventual rapprochement is prompted when Anne's father sits down with the family Bible and, in his reading, hits upon Sky Masterson's "bit about the other cheek". ☺

THE FIVE KEY...

TERENCE STAMP FILMS

With *Song for Marion*, below, in cinemas and a retrospective at BFI Southbank, it's a good time to assess the British screen icon



By Trevor Johnston

He may have trained at drama school, but Terence Stamp's screen presence bears little trace of the theatrical tradition. Gifted with a bone

structure usually reserved for statuary, his singular grace has circumvented the class strictures so often defining British performers. A key 'face' of the Swinging 60s, he survived a fallow 70s, to re-emerge as a character actor of cherishable poise. *Theorem* is rereleased into UK cinemas on 12 April, and a full Stamp retrospective at BFI Southbank follows in May.



1 Billy Budd (1962)

At 24, Stamp made an unforgettable debut in Peter Ustinov's Herman Melville adaptation, his eponymous seaman an embodiment of goodness in conflict with Robert Ryan's sadistic master-at-arms Claggart. It was cinematographer Robert Krasker who suggested the peroxide that facilitated those angelic looks.



2 Toby Dammit (1967)

Fellini's segment of the Edgar Allan Poe-themed triptych *Spirits of the Dead* is a sinister vision of celebrity. Stamp is mesmerising as Toby Dammit, the English fop who's out of his head and out of his depth in the ominous Cinecittà dreamscape.



3 Theorem (1968)

Only Pasolini could conjure up a story wherein a divine stranger's polymorphous sexuality precipitates the breakdown of capitalist patriarchy. Only Stamp could make those ideas flesh, his captivating self-possession radiating erotic and spiritual allure.



4 The Hit (1984)

In Peter Prince's story, directed by Stephen Frears, an East End crook has found enlightenment in Spanish exile when his old gang seek vengeance. The serenity Stamp brings to the role puts this among the great unsung performances in British cinema.



5 The Limey (1999)

Borrowing Ken Loach's *Poor Cow* for flashbacks, Soderbergh constructs a modern thriller on which Stamp inscribes hard-edged vengeance and melancholy musing on lost time. A splendid last blast – though this year's *Song for Marion* suggests Terence still has gas in the tank.

MIKE GRIGSBY (1936-2013)

The death of the documentarist has robbed the film world of a major figure who had yet to receive the true recognition he deserved

By Patrick Russell

The death of British documentarist Michael Grigsby on 12 March came as a shattering shock: not just because it was so sudden but also because he was one of the most infectiously *alive* people his friends, acquaintances and admirers ever knew. It was hard to believe the irrepressibly energetic Grigsby *could* die, let alone that he had.

Grigsby's films, though, will live on. Interest in them will grow and it will become obvious that the body of work he leaves is a major one. That this hasn't yet been universally recognised has much to do with the infrastructural history of British documentary production. Had Grigsby been French or American, he'd be widely feted. It's precisely because, for several decades, UK documentary television was creatively and structurally so strong that its great practitioners were perversely ignored by cineastes. Most of Grigsby's work was made for the small screen. A handful of perceptive critics and historians championed him within cinema culture (notably Ian Christie, Julian Petley, John Corner and Christophe Dupin), but it was broadsheet TV reviewers who most often mentioned his work. An additional problem is that, for rights and other reasons, television films are not yet as widely available digitally as other content.

In fact, Grigsby perfected cinema *and* television: the democratic power of the first with the formal qualities of the second. His talkative, energetic off-screen personality contrasted, intriguingly, with his boldly unhurried, contemplative filmmaking style. In the best traditions of British visual craft, Grigsby excelled at, and flawlessly synthesised, the arts of portraiture and landscape. He spoke often of seeking to give a "voice to the voiceless". People in his films are treated not just with compassion but with rare respect, empowered to find their own eloquence by speaking in long takes, attentive equally to their voices and faces. But they are always meaningfully situated in their physical environment. Few directors imbued their work with such a sense of place. Grigsby's haunting landscape compositions led to justified critical comparisons with Flaherty and Jennings, whom he much admired.

Grigsby, indeed, was inspired to filmmaking by the GPO and Crown Film Unit shorts shown on 16mm projectors at Abingdon School, where he was a pupil in the 1950s. Setting up the precociously named Abingdon Film Unit, he shot amateur films about life at the school. Decades later he remained enthused by *Listen to Britain*, *Coal Face* and *Night Mail*. While working as a Granada Television cameraman he bought his own equipment and spent his spare time making *Enginemen* (1959), about railway workers affected by the shift from steam to diesel. Completed with Lindsay Anderson's help, it was shown at the NFT's final Free Cinema programme. This lovely lo-fi effort was followed by another fine BFI-funded short,



Closely observed trains: Michael Grigsby, Ivan Halleron and Christopher Faulds shooting 'Enginemen'

1962's *Tomorrow's Saturday*. It's a pity that, again because of his television work, Grigsby rarely returned to short-form documentary; the exceptions were the atmospheric *Pictures on the Piano* (1995) and *The Score* (1999), co-funded by the BBC and the Arts Council.

At Granada, Grigsby's career advanced from helming editions of *What the Papers Say* to directing episodes of the documentary series *This England*. Enthusiastically embracing a still-young medium and invigorated by the presence of documentary greats such as Norman Swallow and Denis Mitchell, Granada must have been as exciting a place for young filmmakers to work as the GPO had been 30 years earlier. Grigsby's breakthrough was *Deckie Learner* (1965), about a Grimsby teenager's apprentice trip on a fishing trawler. His fascination (shades of Flaherty and Grierson) with the dangers, isolation and endurance of the fishing life reappeared in the excellent *A Life Apart* (1973).

Continuing for many years at Granada, then later working for other ITV companies and the BBC, Grigsby would often obsessively revisit themes and locales. See, for instance, his trilogy of Northern Ireland films (*Too Long a Sacrifice*, 1984, *The Silent War*, 1990, *Rehearsals*, 2005) and

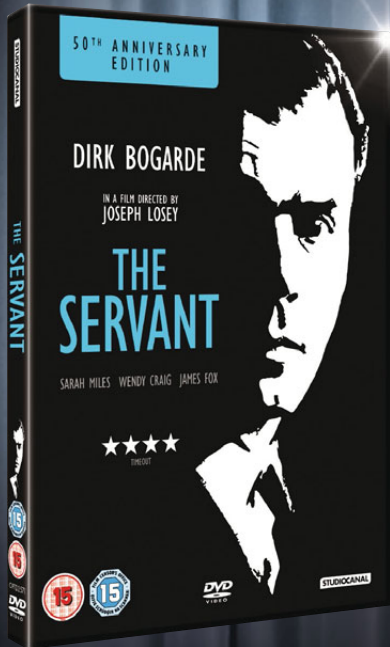
In the best traditions of British visual craft, Grigsby excelled at, and flawlessly synthesised, the arts of portraiture and landscape

his considerations of the effects of the Vietnam War on Americans (*I Was a Soldier*, 1970) and Vietnamese (*The Search*, 1991, *Thoi Noi*, 1993). His career took him everywhere from rural, urban and industrial Britain to Inuit Canada to India. The director's most ambitious films, in scale and thematic implication, were *Living on the Edge* (1987) and *The Time of Our Lives* (1994), sweeping studies of social and political change in Britain that were acclaimed by many as his masterpieces. They are powerful and essential viewing, but perhaps slightly weakened by a certain rather sweet naivety. Grigsby was essentially an emotionally intuitive, visual, humanist filmmaker more than a coldly analytical one. His Troubles trilogy, for example, is full of moving human moments and moody, telling Ulster landscapes, but perhaps doesn't fully penetrate cause and effect. Such largely apolitical films as the superb *Lockerbie: A Night Remembered* (1998) may be Grigsby's most enduring.

Starting out in non-broadcast documentary making, before working through the glory days of TV doc, Grigsby lived to witness the relative decline of the second and participate in the revival of the first. As presiding spirit of the revived Abingdon Film Unit, he and unit head Jeremy Taylor have overseen a remarkable output of documentary and animation shorts. Grigsby's last film *We Went to War*, co-authored with producer and close collaborator Rebekah Tolley, revisits the Texan Vietnam vets he filmed so movingly in 1970. It's out, on the big screen, now. See it, mourn Mike Grigsby's loss, and rediscover his work. 

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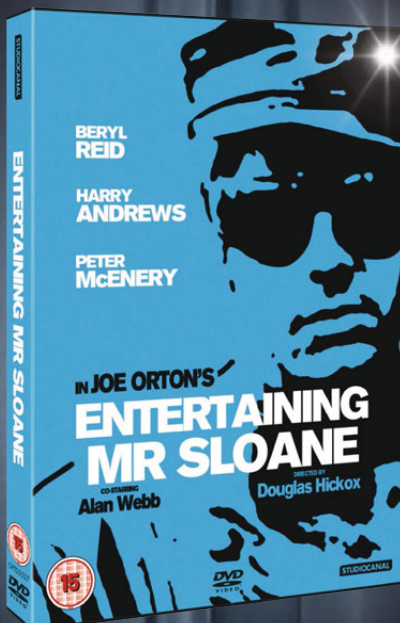
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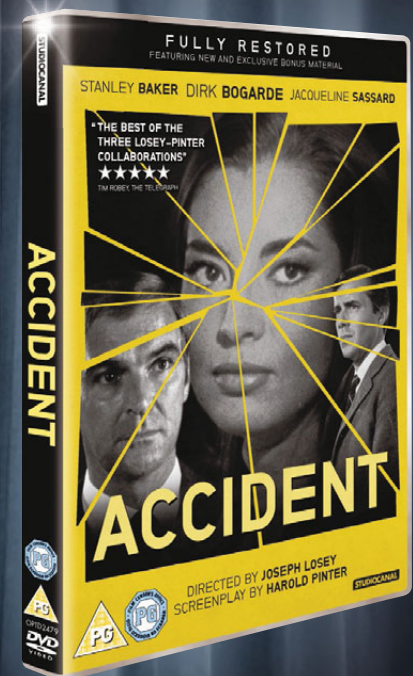
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 - Interview with Harold Pinter expert Harry Burton
- Interview with feminist author and academic Melanie Williams
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THE Z AXIS

Once you start looking, you'll find the Z axis, the relationship between foreground and background, shapes both film aesthetics and economics



By Mark Cousins

Whenever I'm asked for filmmaking advice by a new director, I always say, "Remember the Z axis."

The X axis is up and down, the Y is left and right, the Z is in and out – the relationship between foreground and background. When they're filming a dialogue scene, for example, not enough directors consider what might happen in front of or behind it.

There have been books and thousands of articles on the Z axis, what's usually called deep staging and/or deep focus. It was the signature tune of Orson Welles; it's the dimension that gives William Wyler's *The Best Years of our Lives* (1946) its dimension; it's what makes Béla Tarr movies cavernous and clear; Omar Sharif's spectacular camel ride towards the camera in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) is Z to the power of Z; and, in French critic André Bazin, film had a patron saint of zedness. In cinema's sister art, painting, Vermeer presents us with the domestics of Z; Mantegna puts us at Christ's feet and lays his body backwards, like tram lines; Canaletto does Z with a set square. You could argue that Western Renaissance painting in general marked the discovery of the illusion and coherence of Z.

Z came easily to the movies and was the source of its startle. The train arriving at La Ciotat on celluloid in 1896, and all those phantom rides that followed, showed the thrill of Z, the mother of all *trompe l'oeils*. As movie modes started to emerge and separate, it became clear that some were better at zedness than others. Musicals, for example, were mostly Y – Fred and Ginger were side by side – and comedy is mostly Y (all those double-acts and comedy mid-shots; the exceptions are filmmakers like Tati and Keaton). However, the fact that in horror movies we want to shout "behind you" shows that that genre is more zeddy. One of the pleasures of *Halloween* (1978) for example, is that Michael Myers is in the scene, advancing along the Z. We can see him, but poor Jamie Lee can't. And if horror movies are zeddy, road movies are even more so. They're entranced by Z, in love with it, turned on by it. And such things are not only the concern of a film director. Script editors should, I think, always ask screenwriters, "So what's happening in the Z?"

If *Sight & Sound* could be printed in 3D, I'd ask you to put on the glasses here to emphasise the obvious point that zedness these days isn't only a question for film geeks. Whether we like it or not, 3D cinema is now a part of the multiplex business plan. The aesthetic zedness of Welles-Wyler-Bazin-Tarr has become a staging imperative in kids' films and action cinema these days. Z is what we pay the extra three quid for.

Move beyond mucky money stuff, however, and the idea of Z begins to resonate and open up. If Z has poetics (Welles etc), generics (horror



Depth charge: the Z axis was key to Orson Welles's work, as seen here in 'Citizen Kane' (1941)



It's a long shot: William Wyler's 'The Best Years of Our Lives' (1946)

etc), and economics (the multiplex's 3D), it also has what you could call empathics. In the Y axis, people talk to each other, sing, dance or kiss. Y is the social axis, the plane in which people already know each other or get to know each other. X is, you could argue if you're into such things, the god axis. Religious people in Pasolini and Bruno Dumont movies levitate a bit, Buddhist monks



He's behind you: 'Halloween' (1978)

in King Hu's *A Touch of Zen* (1969) defy gravity. In comparison with these two, the Z axis is a human plane but one in which people leave what they know, their own community or family, and head towards the horizon, over the rainbow, to another world. Zedness is reaching out beyond what you know; it's wanderlust, curiosity. In film terms, it's the axis on which many of the best documentaries work. Zedness is empathy.

While on holiday on Skye recently, I started thinking of making a film about zedness. At dusk, in azure blue light, I filmed a highland cow. The light was so low that the focus was really shallow, but the cow walked towards me, along the Z. As it did, the autofocus on my camera adjusted to keep the cow sharp, along the Z. We talk about 'pulling' focus. Zedness is push and pull.

On Skye I realised that Z is everywhere. It's a visual thing, a filmic thing, a staging thing, a money thing, an optics thing. Maybe most of all, it's a people thing. ☺

DEVELOPMENT TALE

DOUBLE IDENTITY



East meets West: Riz Ahmed plays Changez, a Pakistan-born high achiever whose relationship with America sours after the 9/11 attacks

Mira Nair faced a host of dramatic, financial and cultural challenges in adaptating bestselling novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

By Charles Gant

In spring 2007, Mira Nair and producer partner Lydia Pilcher were busy with the imminent US release of their latest film *The Namesake* when they came across Mohsin Hamid's then-unpublished novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The story of a Pakistan-born high achiever whose success at Princeton and on Wall Street sours in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, its themes of assimilation and alienation resonated especially with Nair, who was born in India, educated at Delhi and Harvard Universities and resides in New York. Despite competition from US studios, the pair won the battle to secure film rights, using their personal funds to option Hamid's book.

The project was back-burnered for a while when Fox Searchlight asked Nair to direct *Amelia*, its Amelia Earheart biopic, released in 2009, before the filmmaker returned to the tricky challenge of adapting the first-person monologue for the screen. The biggest conundrum of all: how to represent the unnamed American stranger to whom protagonist Changez relates his life story over the course of one day?

Says Pilcher, whose partnership with Nair

dates back to 1991's *Mississippi Masala*, "The creative challenge with the novel lies in the fact that it is very literary material, and it's all centred around this conversation in a Lahore tea house. You only meet one person fully; the other person is a mystery. The novel reads like a psychological thriller. It has the Hitchcockian quality of the ticking bomb; the intrigue of the situation that makes you keep turning the pages to see what's going to happen."

Pilcher and Nair initially paired debut feature writer Ami Boghani, a young executive at Nair's Mirabai Films, with novelist Hamid. Development funding for the screenplay came from Saudi-born, London-based cinema-loving entrepreneur Hani Farsi, swerving past traditional partners such as broadcasters and boutique studios. Explains Pilcher, "We were interested in finding development funds that would not come with lots of creative control."

Naming the unknown American Bobby Lincoln, Boghani and Hamid fleshed out the character who, in the film, is a journalist and CIA asset who believes Changez can help locate a kidnapped American whose life is in imminent peril. Says Pilcher, "We concocted different directions in terms of what the urgent situation was that was causing the conversation to be tense. Ultimately we kept finding ourselves returning to the novel. This is an amazing story: what is it that we can do with the movie that doesn't stray too far?"

To get the script across the finishing line, Pilcher and Nair next brought on Bill Wheeler, whose screen credits include the Richard Gere conman tale *The Hoax* (2006). "What we found was that to write a thriller was not an easy thing. We needed someone more adept at that," says Nair. Pilcher adds that the writer also helped to give both characters more authenticity. "There were aspects of Changez that needed to feel American when he was living the American dream," she says. "Bill could help bring that American voice in for those dimensions of Changez's character as well as for Bobby."

While the screenwriters were working on the drafts, Pilcher was talking to international sales agents, investigating the likely market value of the film. The results were not encouraging. "The lead actor was not going to be a Johnny Depp or a Brad Pitt, it was not going to be an A-list actor that Western audiences were going to be familiar with," she says. "In terms of international sales, they're looking at the cast, and to a certain extent the director, and using formulas to translate it into box office. That was really the headache and the challenge: to figure out how to overcome those numbers in a way that could support a budget for a film that was going to be shot in four countries."

With one British financier pressing for budget reductions and bluntly telling Pilcher, "I don't care if you shoot in Rockaway Beach, darling. Let's face it, your leading man is a Pakistani Muslim", rescue came from Qatar's Doha Film

Institute, whose Western-educated chair Sheikhha Mayassa Al Thani took a personal interest in the project. Escalating its commitment from cornerstone equity to full financing, Doha was also supportive of Nair's choice of lead actor, Oxford-educated British Pakistani Riz Ahmed, having seen his charismatic performance in their own production *Black Gold* (2011). Hollywood thespians Liev Schreiber (as Bobby Lincoln), Kiefer Sutherland (as Changez's Wall Street boss) and Kate Hudson (as girlfriend Erica, reconceived as a multimedia artist) added some mid-level cast heft.

With Old Delhi doubling for Lahore, Atlanta standing in for New York (taking advantage of Georgia's tax subsidy), and a two-day shoot in Istanbul, Pilcher and Nair prepared to unveil the film at the opening gala of the Venice Film Festival and then sell it territory by territory at Toronto. Challenges that had been pushed to one side – one screenwriter they'd initially

The novel has the Hitchcockian quality of the ticking bomb; the intrigue of the situation that makes you keep turning the pages

approached for the adaptation had said, "First off, we're going to have to drop the title. You couldn't drag me to a film with the word 'fundamentalist' in it" – now had to be faced. "It hit me much harder when we began to address how to market the film," says Pilcher. "When you're talking about the book, it's a bestseller, it's shortlisted for the Booker, it's on high-school reading lists all over the world, and it sounds great. But then people in the film industry are already envisioning their movie poster, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and it's a whole different thing.

"To come up with one image that really embodied the film was challenging. One company sent us a lot of different images that all included Changez, sometimes in his suit, sometimes in his Pakistani garb. It took me completely by surprise, when I started to test those images, how Western people always wanted to see him in the suit. That was a big eye-opener. What we came up with for the North American campaign is an image that gives you a sense of the essence of the novel: a character headed down a road but looking over his shoulder."

Poster artwork varies by territory, but taglines consistently include the word 'thriller', positioning *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* as a ticking-bomb suspense rather than a political issue movie. Says Pilcher, "Audiences are very comfortable with genre. The opportunity for us was to banner the fact that this is a very different kind of Mira Nair film; it goes beyond any realm of storytelling that she's worked in before but at the same time it has her character-driven Mira Nair handprint. We tried to steer away from the 9/11 angle. I think our challenge was to help buyers and sellers feel that this is going to be an entertaining and exciting movie to watch, while at the same time it's a film of substance." 📢

i **'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' is released in the UK on 10 May, and will be reviewed in the next issue**

THE NUMBERS DOGWOOF DOCUMENTARY LIVE EVENTS



Simulcast: 'The Spirit of '45' event at the Brixton Ritzy in London was beamed into 42 other cinemas

By Charles Gant

The past decade has seen recording artists increasingly looking to live performance for their income, as values for recorded music have declined. And cinemas are also exploring live alternative content – operas, plays, rock concerts, sports events – to supplement the programming mix. While this content is eating into available screen space for film, especially in the indie sphere, one distributor sees the growing audience appetite for live experience as more opportunity than threat.

Documentary specialist Dogwoof was one of the first – and notably successful – companies to add a live component to a film release when it staged a people's premiere for ecological cautionary tale *'The Age of Stupid'* in 2009. With a post-screening discussion between director Franny Armstrong, actor Pete Postlethwaite and the then energy and climate change secretary Ed Miliband, beamed into 54 cinemas, the event grossed more than £71,000, a significant chunk of the film's eventual total of £190,000. Subsequent events for *'Burma VJ'*: Reporting from a Closed Country; *'Dirty Oil'* and *'Countdown to Zero'* performed at a lower level, but the takings similarly represented a hefty proportion of total box office (see chart below).

When Dogwoof pitched to be the UK distribution partner for *'The Spirit of '45'*, Ken Loach's documentary about the creation and dismantling of nationalised industries and the welfare state, a live discussion was a central plank of their conception. Explains distribution boss Oli Harbottle, "With a

historical archival documentary, there is always a concern it will be a relatively hard sell. We wanted to make the most of Ken's involvement and get people involved with the debate."

Working from Dogwoof's offices, a three-person team spent more than two months seeking outreach partners, linking with relevant organisations, trade unions and local political groups. For the event itself, moderator Jeremy Hardy (68,000 Twitter followers) was joined at the Brixton Ritzy by *'Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class'* author Owen Jones (90,000 Twitter followers) and Dot Gibson from the National Pensioners Convention. "Owen was key to help connect this to a younger audience," says Harbottle. "He's in his twenties and very big on social media. These things are important when you have live events."

With the 45-minute discussion beamed into 42 additional cinemas, Dogwoof achieved a record 86 per cent seat occupancy, with reports of a highly diverse audience notably populated by students and pensioners; a Twitter spike during the debate also boosted awareness nationwide. A strategy of collapsed windows means the DVD will be on sale in mid-April, followed swiftly by Film4's transmission in May. Harbottle is confident that the latter will help, not hurt, its own sales. "We have such a wealth of additional material adding up to seven hours spread across two discs. The TV broadcast will help keep the film in the public consciousness, and we believe the audience will want to see more and explore further. This isn't just a nostalgic film, but a very relevant one, and very pressing for the new generation." 📢

DOGWOOF'S LIVE SATELLITE EVENTS

Film	Event gross	Total gross
The Age of Stupid	£71,259	£190,220
The Spirit of '45	£55,033	£149,854*
Burma VJ	£26,896	£44,249
Dirty Oil	£11,005	£12,035
Countdown to Zero	£6,460	£15,042

*gross after 10 days

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OLIVIER PERE

The former Locarno artistic director is still making his presence felt in international film through his new job at Arte France Cinéma

By Kieron Corless

Last summer's edition of the Locarno Film Festival turned out to be the last under the stewardship of Olivier Pèrè. Despite making a considerable impact during his three-year tenure, and seeming set for a contract renewal, Pèrè was unable to resist the opportunity to succeed Michel Reilhac at the Franco-German TV channel Arte, as CEO of Arte France Cinéma, a part of the organisation dedicated to film production. In addition Pèrè is director of the cinema unit of Arte France, in charge of acquisition of both classic films and new features for broadcast on the channel.

Nice work if you can get it. When we met in Paris in January this year, three months into his new job, Pèrè was effusive about the possibilities opening up in his new career path: "It's a very exciting job because you can bring a vision of cinema to bear on all the different aspects of the channel: broadcasting, acquisition and, of course, co-production for cinema."

Pèrè really forged his own vision and reputation prior to Locarno, during his six-year stint as artistic director of the Quinzaine in Cannes, putting his weight behind the fledgling careers of young directors (Raya Martin, Lisandro Alonso, Albert Serra and Miguel Gomes, to name but a few) while skilfully finessing and honouring the Quinzaine's longstanding reputation as a home for world cinema's more independent-minded talents. Undaunted by the bigger scale of Locarno, Pèrè's strategy, as I noted in my report last year, consisted of combining retrospectives of classic directors such as Lubitsch and Ophüls with both quality commercial films and the more radical currents in contemporary world cinema.

There's no doubting Pèrè's breadth of experience and cinephilic chops, but the switch to Arte is something altogether different. "Yes, it's my first time in TV and in production," he says, "so it's brand new, but on the other hand I feel like it's a continuity of something I started with festivals. I don't feel at all lost in the new job because when I arrived my ideals and my knowledge of the industry, international European and French, were quite apparent because of those ten years I spent in festivals. And, of course, I was not a producer and I'm still not a producer, even today; but to be involved in the first step of a film and to give the support of Arte, which is vital for a lot of projects, is very important for me."

Arte co-produces around 20 features each year, but there is also money available for around three cinema documentaries and one animation feature. The budget at Pèrè's disposal for all of these projects is around €9.4 million (£8 million). "It's more or less the same as previous years," he says. "Unlike some of the other French TV channels, we didn't experience a reduction in our budget, so there is a kind of stability in Arte. I have to say, I arrive here at a good moment; the channel is in very good health."



Work of Arte: Olivier Pèrè first forged his reputation as artistic director of the Quinzaine in Cannes

That's excellent news for followers of auteurist cinema. Arte has always represented something of a cinephilic lodestone in that regard; projects commissioned prior to Pèrè's arrival and now ready for unveiling include *The Bastards* directed by Claire Denis, the new film by Edgar Reisz, Bruno Dumont's by all accounts magnificent *Camille Claudel, 1915* and the Ulrich Seidl trilogy.

Pèrè has just chaired his first committee meeting to greenlight new projects, and received unanimous support for his first three co-produced films – Abel Ferrara's *Pasolini*, set entirely on the day of the murder of the Italian director (played by Willem Dafoe – who else?); Nadav Lapid's *L'Institutrice*; and Virgil Vernier's *Mercuriales*. "Of course, we are retaining the Arte tradition of being very devoted to young filmmakers, to the first feature, to the new auteur," he says, "but it's also important to have an editorial line which is devoted to the masters, to the great filmmakers such as Ferrara." And note, too, that those first three co-productions are directed by an American, a Frenchman and an Israeli. This is still the most mind-boggling, un-Anglo-Saxon aspect of French culture: that they'll actually hand out substantial sums of public money (Arte is a state channel) to directors

from around the world, the only stipulations being that a French producer is on board and that the project has artistic merit. Pèrè explains: "We are trying to respect first and foremost the European identity of Arte by of course supporting French cinema, but at the same time being very open and curious about international cinema. We are going to keep it that way."

To someone living in the UK, hearing this brings home with some force not only how detached from Europe we are in our thinking but also how parochial and self-interested our cinema culture still is. Ferrara's films don't even get released here, let alone co-funded and co-produced. And let's not forget the financial and other material support France offers to directors across the developing world through the CNC funding mechanism that used to be called the Fonds Sud, now renamed Cinema du Monde, which has its equivalents in other European countries – Holland, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Germany – but not here, to the detriment of a truly diverse UK film culture.

"Yes, it's a tradition in France to open its doors to artists and filmmakers and to welcome them," says Pèrè, "but also to be very interested in what is going on in other countries. It's crucial to promote French cinema, national cinema, but most of the important French producers are also producing international films with the same interest and the same passion. It represents a political desire and a political vision to be involved in art and cinema all around the world and, in that respect, I really do think we are blessed." ☺

We are devoted to young filmmakers, to the new auteur, but it's also important to be devoted to the masters

SXSW

LOST IN AUSTIN



Flying colours: Omar Mullick and Bassam Tariq's 'These Birds Walk'

South by Southwest featured its share of filler and films that had premiered elsewhere, but there were still gems to be unearthed

By Nick Pinkerton

For most of the year, Austin is as pleasant a place to work and play as any city on earth, gifted as it is with the surrounding scenery of the Texas Hill Country, crisp natural springs, Mexican and barbecue restaurants where one can dine al fresco through the mild winters, and altogether an overabundance of those things that make life worth living.

In March, however, entertainment descends on the Texan capital like a plague; not just the Rodeo Austin, but three permutations of South by Southwest's festivals and conferences. There's Music, the original and cornerstone component, founded in 1987; Film, now in its 20th-anniversary year; and Interactive, created by the schism of SXSW Multimedia, a relative newcomer whose popularity has speedily snowballed and which brings together the architects of the coming singularity in the analogue world, blinking at the sunlight.

In each of its hydra-headed permutations, SXSW is a flagrantly for-profit enterprise – a fact that's evident in the bold-faced sponsorship of

every square inch of the festival, from hip-hop MCs giving on-stage shout-outs for Doritos to internet meme 'Grumpy Cat' being made available for IRL manhandling at the house rented by social-media news website Mashable.

SXSW probably wouldn't have appeared so egregiously commercial, to the point where art seemed an afterthought, had I not arrived in Austin directly from Columbia, Missouri. That medium-sized college town had been hosting its tenth True/False documentary film festival, an event that focuses on films with a formalist flair, particularly those that muddy the distinction between fact and fiction. T/F is a sympathetic little-festival-that-could that has followed the example of Telluride, making its reputation on smart, uncompromised programming despite having no great deal of start-up money. It would be too easy to make an unflattering comparison here at the expense of SXSW Film, which, by building its brand beyond the point where curatorial discretion can exercise control, has hypertrophied to its present ungainliness.

And this is why it would be too easy: in four nights and three days at T/F, I saw more movies that I wanted to campaign for than I did over the full ten-day slog that is SXSW. (For one example, T/F almost single-handedly rescued Lebanese Eliane Raheb's superlative 2012 film *Sleepless Nights* from disappearing on the American festival circuit.) Which is not to say there weren't

things worth seeing at 'South by', as it's now universally called. A few of them had even come from T/F with me, like Omar Mullick and Bassam Tariq's *These Birds Walk*, shot in a Pakistani orphanage, the indefatigable camerawork approximating a child's-eye perspective.

Parsing SXSW's doc slate, I took in Zak Knutson and Joey Figueroa's *MILIUS* and Penny Lane's *Our Nixon* – one a profile of the 'Zen anarchist' director of *Red Dawn* (1984) which attracted a veritable *Who's Who* of movie-brat talking heads, visibly affectionate towards the film's subject; the other a portrait of the 37th US President from his aides' recently exhumed 8mm home movies. Both are as watchable as you might expect given the intrinsically fascinating individuals they're addressing – but no more so. A.J. Schnack and David Wilson's *We Always Lie to Strangers*,



Penny Lane's doc 'Our Nixon'

however, was a real blindsiding discovery: a wrenching work of comic empathy that looks at the year-round residents of Branson, Missouri, a tourist town in the Ozarks which specialises in kitschy musical entertainment. Against Branson's cartooned, family-friendly Americana, Schnack and Wilson reveal the actual diversity of what constitutes family in the heartland, the myth and truth made to augment rather than ironically negate one another. Last year's *Fuck for Forest* centres on an extended family of its own as, with extraordinary intimacy and access, director Michal Marczak documents a Berlin collective that aspires to cure the ailing environment with the proceeds of homemade internet pornography, following them into the dead end of their foolhardy but touchingly naive utopianism.

There was an impressive delegation of Made in Texas films in evidence, including Jeff Nichols's *Mud* from 2012, Andrew Bujalski's *Computer Chess* and Shane Carruth's *Upstream Color*. The last arrived atop a tidal wave of 'reinvents cinema!' buzz, but to my eyes offered only a rudimentary sci-fi premise mused into an appearance of profundity. The whole affair displayed a contemptuous indifference to actors (including the director-star himself) which was the exact opposite of David Gordon Green's very cool, human *Prince Avalanche*. (Starring Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch, *Avalanche's* tale of personal and natural renewal was shot a little way outside Austin in Bastrop, Texas, in the aftermath of an apocalyptic 2011 wildfire.)

All of the aforementioned, as well as Austinite Richard Linklater's *Before Midnight* – which had its local premiere – had already debuted at Sundance. Of the Austin-shot SXSW world premieres, far and away the best was Katie Graham and Andrew Matthews's *Zero Charisma*, which – not surprisingly given the fairly uproarious screening that I attended – went home with the Audience Award. This isn't to say that *Zero Charisma* panders: the film's study of codependent pathology hasn't been cleaned up any more than its protagonist, Scott Weidemeyer, an ill-kempt, overloaded thirtysomething trash-bag of a man who lives with his grandmother and structures his week around dungeon-mastering a D&D-like role-playing game for a group of weedy 'friends' who qualify as such because they can be successfully bullied. Sam Eidson's performance becomes a marvel of spittle-flecked, infantile rancour as Scott's smug facade cracks, his dictatorial control of the only thing he *does* control challenged when a true alpha geek joins his game. (In an age that makes much of the 'triumph' of nerd



Cast away: multimedia artist Celia Rowilson-Hall's disconcerting 'The Audition'

culture, *Zero Charisma* illustrates the delineation between hipster nerd-dom based on choice and that determined by genuine maladjustment.) I went into *Zero Charisma* with no expectations, but once it reached the scene where Scott moves a poster to cover up a hole he's just punched in his bedroom wall only to reveal an identical hole beneath the poster he's moving, I knew I was in the hands of filmmakers with a crack sense of timing. (*Computer Chess*, set among the early-1980s programmer crowd, also deals with a culture of extreme social retardation – something the controversial advertisement of a Facebook hook-up app called 'Bang with Friends' at SXSW Interactive apparently sought to overcome.)

The Grand Jury award went to Destin Daniel Cretton's *Short Term 12*, set in a facility for disturbed, delinquent teenagers – pure middlebrow with about a hundred too many meaningful shots of sad, stoic, knowing, understanding, abiding smiles. The hottest ticket, meanwhile, was the US premiere of Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers*, which packed the 1,200-seat Paramount Theatre, where Texas-born

Disney property Selena Gomez was on hand.

While Korine and Carruth were the festival's touted avant-gardists, their use of feature length seemed less designed to serve their material and intentions than a dutiful compromise to ensure their works' prominence and saleability. The festival's narrative short film programmes were larded with plenty of slick, unremarkable calling-card pieces, but there was also pleasingly disconcerting work nearer to the world of performance/video art by the Miami-based duo Mayer/Leyva (*#PostModern*) and, working in affiliation, New York multimedia artist Celia Rowilson-Hall (*Si nos dejan*, *The Audition*).

In *The Audition*, Rowilson-Hall is put through the wringer by an offscreen casting director, a process that moves from light physical comedy to blasé sado-masochism in the space of three-and-a-half minutes. *#PostModern* is a chain of ten deadpan blackout sketches (described as "a series of cinematic Tweets") in which Mayer appears looking bleary, as though from a lifetime of staring at screens. Pulling in primitive CG avatars, home-shopping graphics and jetpacks, *#PostModern* roasts the same glowing new world that was elsewhere being outlined at Interactive fest panels. More than any other work, it distilled the essence of the crass, absurd future advertised at SXSW. 

 **'Fuck for Forest' is released in the UK on 19 April and is reviewed on page 94**

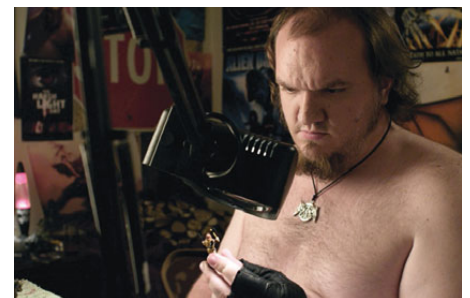
SXSW Film has built its brand beyond the point where curatorial discretion can exercise control



Emile Hirsch and Paul Rudd in 'Prince Avalanche'



Shane Carruth's long-awaited 'Upstream Color'



Sam Eidson in 'Zero Charisma'

COMPETITIONS

SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK: FIVE COPIES ON DVD AND BLU-RAY TO BE WON

David O. Russell's *Silver Linings Playbook* comes to DVD and Blu-ray courtesy of Entertainment in Video. Having spent time in a state institution, Pat returns home to live with his parents and deal with his depression. When he meets a young woman with problems of her own, an unexpected bond develops. Bradley Cooper, Jennifer Lawrence and Robert De Niro star in the much-acclaimed comedy drama. We have five copies to give away on both DVD and Blu-ray.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question and state your edition preference:

Q. Which of these films starred both Bradley Cooper and Robert De Niro?

- The Words
- Limitless
- Everybody's Fine



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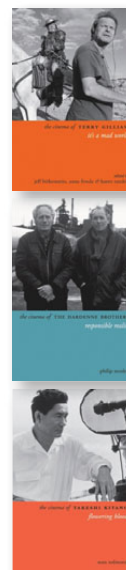
DIRECTORS: WIN BOOKS ON TAKESHI KITANO, THE DARDENNE BROTHERS AND TERRY GILLIAM

In this 'Cinema of...' series from Columbia University Press, film academics analyse the work of some of the most significant directors from around the world. The latest volumes in the collection feature Terry Gilliam, the Dardenne Brothers and Takeshi Kitano, and explore themes that include Terry Gilliam's 'war' on caution and convention in Hollywood and his fight against American hyper-consumerism. We have three sets of the books to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, simply answer the following question:

Q. For which film was Terry Gilliam nominated for the Palme d'Or?

- The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus
- Brazil
- Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas



NEOREALISM: A SELECTION OF FILMS ON DVD

Inspired by our neorealism feature on page 56, we have gathered together a selection of films to give away to three readers. *Man of Aran*, *The End of St. Petersburg* and *People on Sunday*, key films that influenced neorealist filmmaking, are included in the package alongside classic neorealist works such as *Ossessione*, *Bellissima* and *Miracle in Milan*. 'The Neo-realist Collection' also includes *I Vitelloni*, *Umberto D* and *Rome, Open City*.

To be in with a chance of winning all of these films, simply answer the following question:

Q. On which James M. Cain novel is 'Ossessione' based?

- The Postman Always Rings Twice
- Love's Lovely Counterfeit
- Jealous Woman



Our thanks to Arrow, BFI DVD, Eureka Entertainment Ltd and Park Circus for these prizes

HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Neorealism competition', 'Silver Linings Playbook competition' or 'Director Books competition' in the subject heading, to s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk. Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Neorealism competition', 'Silver Linings Playbook competition', or 'Director Books competition' at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN.

The deadline for all competitions is Tuesday 14 May 2013.

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March issue winners:

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'My Brother the Devil' Blu-rays – Oliver Crook, David Miller, Erlend Palm, Laszlo Purdy, Thomas Stoddart.

Richard Burton Diaries – Ivor Nash, Karl O'Keeffe, Andrea Peace, Ann Ryan, James Vujicic.

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DAMSELS IN EXCESS
Left to right: 'Spring Breakers'
Faith (Selena Gomez),
Cotty (Rachel Korine),
Brit (Ashley Benson) and
Candy (Vanessa Hudgens)



Harmony Korine's *'Spring Breakers'*, plunging us into the distinctly American carnival that is Spring Break, is marked by a steadfast refusal to judge its characters' antics. So is it just a gun-crazy *'Girls Gone Wild'* or is there something more in the mix?

By Simon Reynolds

An American tradition that dates back to shortly after World War II, Spring Break today involves hordes of college students descending on Florida beach towns for week-long bacchanals of binge drinking and bare flesh. Taking place in the gap between the second and third terms of the academic year, it's essentially an amplified version of what goes on every weekend at frat houses across America, especially at those 'party schools' where higher learning is not necessarily a priority for the students. The only differences are the duration of the debauch and the fact that the revellers wear bikinis and thongs and trunks.

'Break' echoes the idea of school breaktime, when children dash out of class and play free. Confusingly, Americans use the word 'school' where the British refer to 'university'. But that does effectively capture the way that college, for most American middle-class kids, is merely an extension of high school; marginally more autonomous but still a time of grafting for grades and extra credit, all of which are entered into a ledger whose final tally determines what kind of career you'll have.

The first scenes in Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* had me flashing on Chuck Berry's 1957 single 'School Days', which juxtaposes the dragging time of the classroom with the ecstatic release of the jukebox joint: "Soon as three o'clock rolls around/You finally lay your burden down... All day long you been wanting to dance." In the lecture hall, a professor drones on about Jim Crow laws and the black struggle for civil rights. Bored and restless, two female students – Brit and Candy, played by Ashley Benson and Vanessa Hudgens – amuse themselves by drawing an erection plus the slogan "I Love Penis" on a sheet of paper and miming fellatio. ➔

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE



GLO-ING MY WAY
Harmony Korine's 'vision' of a girl in bikini and ski mask was the visual starting-point for 'Spring Breakers'



The salacious duo and their marginally less-wicked friend Cotty (Rachel Korine) are desperate to escape the college grind and get away to Spring Break. So is their new friend Faith (Selena Gomez), a virginal, goody-two-shoes type who's in a Christian youth group ("Are you jacked up on Jesus?" asks the pastor), but who's being seduced off the path of righteousness by the charismatic Candy and Brit. The only hitch is that, after pooling all their cash, the four girls discover they don't have nearly enough to get to Florida.

Desire confronts a limit. But in the first sign that *Spring Breakers* is set to ascend through stages of implausibility into sheer fantasy, desire wills itself through. The girls blindly grope their way past the impasse, almost seeming to stumble on the solution: crime. The script, here and at other critical moments, has an incantatory quality; phrases repeat and accumulate like a magic spell. Bitching about their plight ("so tired of seeing the same things every single day...") the girls seemingly hypnotise themselves into a volitional state ("I'm not going to sit in the same classroom... we've *been* stuck here... we're getting *out of here*"). After stealing their poor old professor's car, Brit, Candy and Cotty rob a fast-food diner and its working-class customers. Given their slight physiques and girlish voices, pulling off this stunt requires whipping themselves into a thuggish frenzy. "We can *do* this... just fucking pretend like it's a videogame... act like you're in a movie or something." The girls need to believe their own make-believe. To make it to Spring Break, they break the law but also break with Reality.

Because I've more in common with the professor than with these tearaways, watching *Spring Breakers* I immediately thought of the Situationists: their slogan "Take your desires for reality", the pamphlet diatribe *On the Poverty of Student Life*, the notion of "the politics

of boredom". Above all, I thought of that widely daubed graffiti of Paris 1968, "Under the pavement lies the beach": pavement (the flat, functional surface guiding the citizen-consumer to the workplace and the shops) representing mundanity, business as usual, "the poverty of everyday life"; beach (a sandy, sun-kissed playpen for kids and adults temporarily reverting to childhood) representing the utopia of life as permanent vacation. Paradise regained.

I'm afraid I also thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: the notion of the carnival, defined as "an event in which all rules, inhibitions, restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended": a Medieval ritual in which the world is turned upside down in a potlatch of pleasure, profanity and insubordination.

THE POWER OF NOW

As it happens, 'carnival' is a word that has new currency in American pop culture through the massive success of Electric Daisy Carnival, the brand-leader of the new breed of festivals for EDM (electronic dance music). These massive, weekend-long dance parties combine the drugginess of 1990s raves with the non-hipster appeal of Spring Break – but they also weave in aspects of fancy dress and fantasia derived from Mardi Gras and Cirque du Soleil. The clothing worn by devotees of Electric Daisy Carnival and similar festivals mixes super-sexed-up outfits (many of the girl ravers are clad in lingerie, barely more dressed than the female cast of *Spring Breakers*) with kitschy-surreal accoutrements like fairy wings.

Spring Breakers latches onto the EDM boom with its soundtrack, partly the work of Skrillex, whose audiovisual spectacles have made him king of the new dance-festival circuit in America. His tracks deftly merge dubstep's blaring bass-blasts with the hands-in-the-air builds and climaxes of trance. But the overall effect betrays his past in the emo punk band From First To Last: an electronic, digital-maximalist update of the moshing catharsis offered by arena rock styles. EDM buzz phrases like "rage hard" and the popular acronym-slogan YOLO ("you only live once") express a spirit of embattled hedonism and let's-get-wrecked recklessness. My own term for this *carpe diem* attitude is NOW!-ism. It has a formal corollary in the music and the videos, which offer a barrage of sensational effects and non-sequential intensities: pop videos involving costume changes and location shifts every five seconds, sampled phrases or rapped lyrics that freeze-frame moments of triumph, glory, excess, disdain, euphoria.

Even more than its EDM tie-in, *Spring Breakers* references the mainstream radio sounds of dance pop and gangsta rap. There are several overt nods to Britney Spears, including the deliberate echo in Brit's name and a scene in which the girls sing Spears's breakthrough smash '...Baby One More Time'. The arrival of drug dealer and aspiring rapper Alien (James Franco) shifts the movie away from EDM's artificial elation and pseudo-communality and into hip hop's fantasy world of regal splendour and paranoia. Wearing corn-rows and a grill of gold teeth, Alien takes the girls under his wing. Even though he never learns about their foray into armed robbery, this self-described "gangsta with a golden heart" recognises them instinctively as "motherfuckin' soul-mates."



Some of the key scenes involving Alien appear to have been made expressly as DVD-rewind favourites, to be endlessly karaoke-performed by fans

CULTURAL MASH-UP

Writer-director Harmony Korine explains how amateur porn and trance-dance loops inspired the dazed-glo aesthetic of 'Spring Breakers'

By Amy Taubin

AT: What inspired 'Spring Breakers'?

HK: A couple of years ago I started collecting Spring Break imagery from various sites – co-ed pornography sites to frat party sites, Wild Cancun reality sites. I was using them mostly for paintings and art work. But looking at them all together I was intrigued by the details – by how sexualised and violent the imagery was but also by all these childlike pop-culture indicators, the fluorescent bathing suits and Hello Kitty bags. It was like a coded language or a separate vernacular. I thought it was an interesting background. That's it. And then I dreamed up this image of girls on a beach in bikinis robbing fat tourists. And then I saw this Nashville rapper, Young Buck, wearing a ski mask and gold teeth. I thought it would be amazing to see these girls in bikinis with ski masks. That's how it started – like a vision. And if those images were to exist in real life, how would it happen? That's how the story came.

AT: How closely did you stick to the script?

HK: It's always a mixture of things. Directing is not so straightforward. I write scripts very quickly. It's like a sketch. Like when you make a painting – trying to figure out what colours to use. I try to make the script good enough to raise money with it and get the actors I need. And then I develop it during the rehearsals and the shooting. I had a definite storyline, narrative and characters, but when we were all there it developed.

AT: Did you always plan to have Faith [Selena Gomez] leave at the halfway point?

HK: She was always meant to go at that point. The girls were four parts of a single entity. She's the morality, so once she leaves that's stripped. And then Cotty [Rachel Korine] goes next, and you're left with something really primal and violent, and that's when all the damage is done and all the excitement happens.

AT: How will you answer when people say this is a racist film? You have young white women massacring black gangster drug dealers.

HK: I would say that's the storyline. That's the way that world works. I never saw it as racist. I don't think the girls think of colour in that way. The way they act is a kind of cultural mash-up – a reinterpretation of that world. So for them, they are just bad guys. It even says in the beginning of the film that Alien [James Franco] was best friends with Archie, the black drug dealer [Gucci Mane], when they were boys. So I didn't see it as racist, although there is definitely

a racial distinction. It's just a job these girls have to do. They have to execute these guys.

AT: Could we talk about the shape of the movie? It is a narrative but, because the dialogue and the images keep recirculating, present, past, and future get mashed up.

HK: I wanted to make something that was more like a drug experience, that was more experiential, [but] that had a physical side to it. I felt like if it was something that I could explain in words, I didn't want to use it. So in talking to the cinematographer, the production designer, the editor, I made it clear that I wanted to make a film that is propelled by a story, but around the edges I wanted what I thought of as liquid narrative. I had been trying to develop micro-scenes – things that happened quickly and would repeat. That was based on electronic music – loop-based and trancelike. Things that would repeat like mantras or choruses in pop songs, things that would get lodged in your head. That became the model or aesthetic for the film. But mostly I tried not to pay attention to time and to have the film be based in a kind of energy.

AT: In the first half, I felt as if I was outside the movie looking in, but once only two of the girls are left I got so involved. They are the Furies, but somehow you care about them. It's like you're playing a videogame and it doesn't matter that it's awful, you're just into it.

HK: Yes, that's what I tried to do. Again, it goes back to when I was looking at those Spring Break pictures. They worked in two ways. There was

I thought it would be amazing to see these girls in bikinis with ski masks. That was how it started – like a vision



Sweet Harmony: Korine eyes a wider audience

a seductive side to it and there was a nasty side. There was the pop side that seemed like candy and gloss and there was this sinister energy that was like the residue from the surface. There was a duality, or a sexual and moral ambiguity. You are watching people who are compelling and who you root for even though they do these borderline sociopathic deeds. That was the goal.

AT: Will the movie be released in multiplexes?

HK: Yeah. We got an R in the US. In France it's 12 but in Germany it's 18. Hopefully a lot of people who never saw my other films will see this.

AT: Did you have to cut anything to get the R? Like the oral penetration with the guns?

HK: No, the rating board had a problem with one or two shots of girls with huge asses. And I had done these twerking [dance] sequences, and they had a problem with those, so I dealt with that.

AT: Did you shoot the whole thing on film?

HK: Yes, 35mm. But we also had these little novelty video cameras, and we basically attached them to the main camera or to steadicams, and we had them on all different settings, like sepia, and some so they looked kind of like Super 8. I used the stuff from the little cameras very sparingly, for these kind of morphing, druglike effects. The are like punctuations, like hallucinatory visual stabs.

AT: And the lurid colours? Did you gel the lights or did you do the colour in post-production?

HK: We brought everything out in post but [DP] Benoît [Debie] and I were always talking in terms of colour. I wanted a hyper-stylisation, almost like a world of neon painting. We lit the rooms as if the lights were Skittles or Starburst candy. Lots of gels, lots of diffusion. And we mixed that with scenes on the street where we looked for interesting existing light sources. We'd find places that matched what we were doing inside; in Florida, there are buildings that are lit up in fluorescent yellow.

AT: And then there's the music by Skrillex...

HK: The score was a collaboration between Skrillex and Cliff Martinez. If the film is about a type of energy, that's Skrillex's bombarding, physical electronic music that has these pop elements as well. Like the film, the music never lets you get comfortable. I wanted it constantly to be shifting. And I also wanted there to be beautiful, soft pop elements mixed in with all the harder stuff and that's what his music and Cliff's music is. Also, Skrillex is of that culture – he's someone they'd be listening to.

AT: Is Jane Holzer [one of the executive producers] Baby Jane Holzer, the former Warhol Superstar?

AT: Yeah. She's incredible. She came down to Florida while we were shooting

AT: How old would Lefty, your four-year-old daughter, have to be before you'd let her see the movie?

HK: I'd have to see where her personality was at. If she was susceptible and unhinged, I'd probably want her to wait until her late teens. If she was together, I'd let her see it at 15.

When a pop star as bland as Katy Perry sings about binge drinking past oblivion and ménage-a-trois romps, it's clear that excess is normative and 'breaking loose' just another set of chains



Some of the key scenes involving Alien appear to have been made expressly with the intention of being DVD-rewind favourites, to be endlessly quoted and karaoke-performed by fans, just like the "Say hello to my little friend!" line in 1983's *Scarface*. One of these sequences has Alien showing off to the girls, repeatedly exulting "Look at my shit" as he points to his deluxe bed ("That not a bed, it's an art piece") and brandishes a bounteous array of assault weapons. Even before *The Sopranos* it was a cliché that gangsters like to watch gangster movies and are influenced by them: a feedback Möbius loop of simulacrum shaping reality shaping simulacrum shaping... And sure enough, Alien points to his flatscreen TV and says, "I got *Scarface* on repeat!" Close on the heels of this scene comes another would-be-classic candidate: Brit and Candy grab some guns and turn the tables on their host. When they orally 'rape' him with the weapons, Alien responds like a true sport and ardently sucks off the barrels. It's an echo of an earlier scene where one girl fills a water pistol with liquor and ejaculates it into her own mouth.

Franco apparently based his character on a real-life white rapper called Dangeruss. But why Franco even needed a template is unclear, given that the white appropriation of the Stagger Lee archetype is one of the longest-running stories in popular culture, from the Rolling Stones to Eminem. Stagger Lee is at once a historical legend and a recurring social fact: the fantasy, realised at severe cost both to those who pursue it and to the community they inhabit, of criminality as a life without limits. The gangster is a sovereign individual in a world of peons and bureaucrats, someone whose existence is both regal (swathed in luxury and prestige) and primal (a warrior's life, shedding blood for territory,

vengeance and honour). Alien embroils the girls in his struggle with rival gangster Archie, played by cult rapper Gucci Mane. On the surface, the enmity is explained as a mixture of friendship betrayed and turf war. But at a subliminal level the dispute is also about symbolic capital: Alien's appropriation of what belongs to the black gangster, his stylisation of rapacity, the lore and lingo he invented.

As Archie, Gucci Mane gets to utter the movie's most memorable line, when he praises the giver of a blowjob with "You're playing Mozart on my dick, baby." But for a film whose function is partly to give an adult edge to the careers of former teen-TV stars like Gomez and Hudgens, there is a surprising deficit of actual carnality. *Spring Breakers* is mostly about sexual display. So there's lots of bump 'n' grind dancing in the semi-nude, guys and girls sniffing coke off the flat abdomens of girls and guys and raunchy talk: "the smell of money" makes a girl wet, a coquettish and wasted Cotty taunts a guy that he'll "never get the pussy". But apart from Archie's blowjob threesome, there's just one actual sex act. (Gomez, notably, has exited the storyline by this point. Clearly she was only prepared to go so far in an R-rated direction: she's not involved in the robbery, is never shown taking drugs or having sex and doesn't even swear much.)

As depicted in Korine's film, the participants in Spring Break act out an idea of unbridled freedom and lascivious irresponsibility that's as convention-bound and repetitive as the regular, regulated life of which it's a carnivalesque inversion. Is that the message? It's hard to say: the director steadfastly refrains from anything that might resemble judgement. As with his script-writing debut *Kids* (1995), you can take *Spring Breakers* as an indictment of youth today, a comment on how pop

GANGSTA STYLE

The girls are taken under the wing of drug dealer and rapper Alien, played by James Franco complete with gold teeth and corn-rows





culture's anti-social fantasies contaminate real life. Or you can enjoy it as a (pretty softcore) wank-fantasy.

There's a smidgeon of a hint of authorial irony in the juxtaposition of squalour (a passed-out girl in a vomit-spattered toilet) with voiceovers from the girls phoning their mothers to reassure them that they're having a great time, they've met so many wonderful people, "next year I want to come here with you". What's disquieting about these phone calls, which recur at various points and have that same incantatory repetitiousness, is you're not sure that the girls are simply spinning a line of bullshit (a thought to give jitters to anyone in the audience who's actually a parent). Could it be that they actually believe what they're saying, when waxing lyrical about how "it's like paradise here... so magical... I'm starting to think this is the most spiritual place I've been... It's way more than just having a good time"?

One of the voiceover lines crystallises the movie's theme: "It's so nice to get a break from reality." The point of carnival is that it's temporary. Faith says wistfully, "If we could just freeze time, this is the way it's going to be forever, this moment." But she acquiesces to the school-bell call of reality and, like everybody else, heads back to college. The two really bad girls, Brit and Candy, don't. They stay with Alien, who boasts, "I live at the beach all year around." But to actually live full time without limits is psychosis. By the movie's end, the girls finally become videogame characters, toting AK-47s and clad in pink balaclavas and yellow bikinis.

Unlike earlier youth-gone-bad movies in which non-entities retaliate for the fate of boredom and anonymity promised by their environment – *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Badlands* (1973), even ludicrous ram-raiding exploitation vehicle *Shopping* (1993) – there is no comeuppance for these renegades from reality. The movie, which starts out gritty and naturalistic, ends up an oneiric art-movie dilation of the gangsta-rap video, a porno tone poem.

Watching *Spring Breakers* play out to its morally unsatisfactory (in)conclusion, I thought finally of Marcuse's concept of "repressive desublimation". Way back in the 1960s, the Frankfurt School associate grasped that capitalism had an interest in creating wanton consumers, insatiable and impulsive. External

constraints on our appetites for sex and destruction still exist (police, law, social services etc), but they are contradicted and undermined by a consumer capitalism that erodes internal restraints like guilt and inhibition, the ability to defer gratification, even the capacity for linear thought. Stimulating desire and narcissism, the economy's interests collide with those of other political structures like church, education and family, all of which aim to channel energy into long-term projects ('heaven' being the longest-term of them all). Capitalism and advertising, as well as their bedfellow pop culture, have harnessed Romanticism not for repressive ends (unrepression is precisely the *modus operandi*) but for the dissipation of energy and the displacement of anger from any kind of political articulation.

When a pop star as bland as Katy Perry can sing, in her number-one hit 'TGIF', about binge-drinking past oblivion ("It's a blackout blur, but I'm pretty sure, it ruled") and *ménage-à-trois* romps, it seems pretty clear that excess is normative and 'breaking loose' just another set of chains. Likewise, of *Spring Break* and *Spring Breakers*, I found myself wondering: if this is the beach underneath the pavement, what, if anything, lies beyond the beach? Pop culture in its present state has exhausted its point; its incitements to poor impulse control and attention-deficit disorder no longer threaten anything.

If desublimation is regressive on both the individual psychological level and in terms of its political consequences, can one perhaps talk of a 'progressive re-sublimation'? What seems likely to be valued in the future is the ability to wrench oneself out of the state of distraction, damp down the desirousness stimulated by consumer capitalism. Discipline, focus, rigour: everything that cuts through the non-linearity of post-MTV, post-internet pop culture (using the word 'linear' as a pejorative is so 20th-century, don't you think?). The artistic corollary of such a shift might be a director who actually dared to pass judgement, who was unafraid to risk being didactic; in other words, to be more like the lecturer in the hall and less like a lecher ogling babes on the dancefloor.



'Spring Breakers' is released in the UK on 5 April, and is reviewed on page 106

POOL PARTY
Cotty (Rachel Korine, above) and the other girls progress from sunlit outdoor frolics to a darker criminal milieu



MEN OF SHADOWS AND FOG

With its classical hero and traditional structure, Sergei Loznitsa's second feature 'In the Fog' is the furthest venture into fiction yet for a filmmaker who began as one of Russia's most consistently fearless documentarists

By Anna Fomicheva

IN THE CROSSFIRE

In 'In the Fog' railway worker Sushenya (Vladimir Svirski) is captured by the Nazis, top, only to find himself in trouble with the partisans, below, on his release

A forest in the dead of night: it is 1942 in Nazi-occupied Belarus. Sushenya (Vladimir Svirski) is a square-built railway worker who's literally just dug his own grave and is waiting, passively, to be executed by his former friend Burov (Vlad Abashin), a partisan whose comrade is keeping guard. Sushenya was imprisoned by the Germans along with three other railway workers, but then mysteriously released while the others were publicly hanged. His miraculous survival makes it seem that he is a traitor and so the two partisans have come to his house to visit justice upon him and have walked him into the woods. We know, or think we know, that he is innocent, though there is more to be learned about him in flashback. And his future, if he has a future, is one that will become increasingly unclear.

In the Fog (*V tumane*), the film I'm describing, is the new feature from Belarus-born Sergei Loznitsa, a former mathematician, translator of Japanese and prolific maker of documentaries. He made his fiction feature-film debut in 2010 with *My Joy* (*Schastye moe*), a hard-hitting, narratively bold story of a truck driver whose life is swallowed up by the great Russian hinterland. The film immediately attracted critical attention when it was selected for the official programme at Cannes. *In the Fog* met with even higher acclaim at last year's festival.

Loznitsa's early career was devoted to contemplative documentaries about life and hardship in provincial Russia. These led to the experiments in editing old Soviet footage that produced the poignant *Blockade* (*Blokada*, 2006), which re-uses well-known archival imagery of the siege of Leningrad and recreates the absent sound. With *My Joy* Loznitsa not only turned to fiction but also made a nightmarish, explicit, unforgiving critique of post-Soviet Russia.

In the Fog is a very different beast, a historical drama based on a novella by Vasil Bykov that concerns characters with complex moral dilemmas and explores the indistinct line between fate and free will. The measured pace, small cast and spare dialogue magnify the film's thematic focus. The work of cinematographer Oleg Mutu (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, *My Joy*), with its muted palette and precision of expression, makes the film a joy to watch. There is a stripped-down quality that allows the viewer to consider the potential outcomes and moral implications of every decision, even those of someone as seemingly doomed as the stoical Sushenya.

Anna Fomicheva: You were born in Belarus, you've studied in Ukraine and Russia, you live in Germany and German companies back your films. You're described as a Belarus/Ukrainian director, but your films are often referred to as Russian. How do you identify yourself?

Sergei Loznitsa: Well, my films can hardly be defined as German, but after that it gets confusing, because these countries are very close. They are referred to as Russian because they are seen as belonging to Russian culture. This kind of division makes sense when we talk about states, but not when we talk about culture. The countries that partook in the production of my latest film included Belarus, Russia, Latvia, Germany and Holland. About half of the budget was German and the rest was given to us by the other four countries, including private organisations and even individuals.

AF: Many Russian critics have commented that 'In the Fog' is shot in the tradition of a Soviet war film. Do you feel the influence of Soviet cinema on your work?

SL: When we talk about Soviet cinema we need to be clear about what we mean. On one hand we can talk about the Soviet political system, or on the





other we can talk about the cinema of the 1960s, 70s, 80s. Because for me the works of Iosseliani, Parajanov, Muratova, Tarkovsky, German, Abdrashitov are anti-Soviet in the sense not just that they stayed away from praising that social system, but that their very essence stood in opposition to it. The films made during that period by such individuals have had a big influence on me. This tradition is unavoidable – the same as literature and music. It all influences me. I graduated from VGIK, the oldest film school in the world, and traditions are very strong there. I don't know about now, but certainly when I studied there certain values were passed on to us without ever being talked about explicitly. We existed in them. The teachers I was lucky to study under passed on a lot of traditions from the Soviet period to us, for which I am grateful.

AF: 'In the Fog' is a significant departure from 'My Joy' in that although the world is a harsh place in both films, the characters' actions in the new film are morally and ethically motivated. Also, 'In the Fog' has a more traditional narrative structure.

SL: I would say that one film grew out of the other. In fact the second film grew out of opposition to the first. In *My Joy* we have the absence of a hero in the classical sense of the word – not in the patriotic sense but in the sense of a character who takes actions for which he is responsible and which are the result of conscious decisions. All the characters in *My Joy* can be described as dead souls, and the film's narrative is ironic. Even though it has a tragic ending, it is full of comedic moments. *In the Fog* is classical drama, with a classical hero. The structure of the film is traditional. This is, of course, an illusion, but it offers a way of combining modernist features with classical drama. For instance, the film's flashbacks [to the events that led up to Sushenya's arrest] have a very specific function.

AF: What was it about this story that appealed to you?

SL: The fact that the story has a hero, and that his fate is represented in a particular way. When I read the novella I immediately wanted to make it into a film, and wrote the script pretty much straight away. Although I was not ready to make it at the time; a certain amount of time had to pass – it had to rest for a while.

AF: Could you tell us a little bit about how you managed to get such impressive fog in the shot?

SL: Let it remain a mystery. It's magic.

AF: The magic of cinema?

SL: Yes – we put the camera on and the fog appeared! There is a very good documentary filmmaker, Victor Kossakovsky, and he tells this story that whenever he arrives anywhere and switches on his camera, something immediately happens in front of it. It's magic! It seriously is, because the result that we get at the end of the experiment – let's call shooting a film an experiment – is combined from what is looked at and who is looking. What you see on film is not what we look at or what was represented but the union of both. The person who is looking partakes in the final result. In this sense we can talk about the film existing only in the viewer's head. How the viewer managed to achieve such a magical fog effect is a question I should be asking you.

AF: How does your documentary work – which emphasises people's daily struggle with the physical world around them – feed into your features?

SL: In 1997 we went to shoot my second [documentary]

film in provincial areas and I was astonished at the state of things there. I am an urban person and I never looked closely at what happens in those areas. I started travelling around with some dedication and I realised these areas – at least in the European parts of the former Soviet Union that were under German occupation – still carry the scars. I kept returning again and again in the hope of finding green shoots of recovery, because I was in despair about what I saw. I don't know how things are there now, but I suspect that not much has changed. This is what my documentary films are about the state of things in those provincial areas.

AF: Is there a big difference for you between documentaries and feature films as forms of expression? Godard said that there is theatre and there is documentary realism, but at the highest level they are one and the same.

SL: Godard is absolutely right there, but there is still an important difference, which lies in the ethical position of the author. There are things that would be impossible to shoot as a documentary that you could shoot if you were making a feature film, but this division lies in our impression of it, not in the resulting material. There is also, of course, the difference in the way that you get this material, although sometimes the method can become almost the same. For instance, you throw an actor into the street [and follow him] with a camera to get certain reaction, or you have an unrehearsed scene and actors have to improvise. These are very similar approaches:

AF: You have worked with cinematographer Oleg Mutu on both your features.

SL: Oleg Mutu is an outstanding cinematographer, one of the best working today. He thinks visually – and forces me to have the same frame of mind. We start pre-production very early. For instance we've just finished storyboarding our next film *Babi Yar* [about the massacre in the Ukraine in 1941], but I won't start shooting until next year. So there is still time to think about it all, and then meet up again and perfect it even further. I prefer to prepare well in advance, so as to never find myself in a situation with a hundred people waiting and I don't know what I'm doing. If a film works you can be sure that there is a great team behind it. They always talk about the importance of the director and often the actors, but in reality it's a team art.

i 'In the Fog' is released in the UK on 26 April, and is one of our Films of the Month on page 80

The result we get at the end of the experiment – let's call shooting a film an experiment – is combined from what is looked at and who is looking

CONDEMNED MAN
Sushenya shares a poignant scene with his wife (Julia Peresild) before the partisans come for him



HOW WE WON THE WAR

Throughout the Soviet era, stories of the 'Great Patriotic War' were a staple of Russian cinema, but they evoked a range of responses from some of the era's greatest filmmakers

By Michael Brooke

Since the moment Hitler's tanks first trundled eastwards, the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' has cast the longest of shadows over Soviet and Russian cinema. Sergei Loznitsa is merely the latest in a very long line of Russian filmmakers that includes some of his most distinguished compatriots.

During the war itself, films served a primarily propagandist function, with documentary units switching overnight from anti-British and anti-Polish newsreels to anti-Nazi equivalents. Longer documentaries were also very popular, including Alexander Dovzhenko's *The Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine* (1943), which combined footage from captured German newsreels with Dovzhenko's own more lyrical material.

Fiction films were initially hampered by Mosfilm and Lenfilm's relocation to central Asia, which produced many logistical and technical challenges, not least that of faking harsh Soviet winters in balmy climes. But once production resumed, over two-thirds of Soviet features made between 1942 and 1945 were directly related to the war in some way. Few of these were artistically important, but Mark Donskoi's partisan film *Rainbow* (1944) had its admirers, as did Sergei Gerasimov's *The Great Land* (1944), about a factory being physically relocated to the Urals following the Nazi invasion.

The major Soviet WWII masterpieces emerged after Stalin's death, when filmmakers were finally able to tell more complex, morally ambiguous stories. The first widely recognised classic was Mikhail Kalatozov's Palme d'Or-winning *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957), in which the traumas of war and enforced separation are heightened by cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky's virtuoso mastery of the moving camera. It was followed in rapid succession by Grigori Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), Sergei Bondarchuk's *Destiny of a Man* (1959, showcasing an intriguingly masochistic performance from the director himself) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* (1962). The latter, with its child protagonist and frequent eavesdropping upon his dreams, showed how versatile a wartime setting could become in the hands of a major artist.



War child: Tarkovsky's debut 'Ivan's Childhood' showed how poetic a WWII movie could be

But the thaw only went so far. When Alexei German explored notions of patriotic heroism through the persona of a Red Army officer who initially defected to the Nazis, his film *Trial on the Road* (1971) was shelved for 15 years. The release of German's next film *Twenty Days Without War* (1975) was also delayed for several years, presumably because of its explicitly anti-war theme and its denunciation of the crude propaganda methods used by wartime filmmakers.

German's films are good examples of the more thoughtfully personal films being made between huge, often international co-productions such as Bondarchuk's *They Fought for the Motherland* (1975) and Yuri Ozerov's *The Battle of Moscow* (1985). Others include Stanislav Rostotsky's Oscar-nominated *At Dawn It's Quiet Here* (1972), about the shifting relationship between a male officer and six much younger and less experienced women, and Semyon Aranovich's *Torpedo*

Bombers (1983), an unsentimental portrait of the lives of personnel on an air-force base.

Larissa Shepitko's *The Ascent* (1976) contrasts two partisans on a mercy mission in occupied Belarus, one murdered by the Nazis while the other survives only by betraying everything that he stands for. After Shepitko's death, her husband Elem Klimov realised her dream of dramatising the Nazis' total destruction of the Belarussian village of Khatyn: this became *Come and See* (1985), one of the cinema's most viscerally vivid depictions of war as a living hell. The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union was matched by a parallel collapse in film finance, and it wasn't until 2002 that Russian cinema returned to large-scale war films with Nikolai Lebedev's *The Star*, about soldiers operating behind enemy lines.

A handful of Western films have also dramatised the Eastern Front, distinguished examples being Sam Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron* (1977) and Joseph Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad* (1993). Unsurprisingly, Russians have been slow to tackle the USSR's activities between 1939 and 1941 (the time of the grievously misnamed 'Non-Aggression Pact' with the Nazis), with even recent films like Alexander Kott's otherwise impressive *Fortress of War* (2010) omitting mention of what exactly the Red Army was doing on formerly Polish territory prior to the 1941 Nazi invasion of the USSR.

That said, after failing to secure theatrical distribution, Andrzej Wajda's sombre *Katyn* (2007) – about one of the war's most notorious Stalin-sanctioned atrocities and its subsequent Soviet-backed cover-up – was shown on one of Russia's main television channels. ☹



'Come and See'

WINGS OF DESIRE

Pedro Almodóvar's *I'm so Excited!* is a return to the carnality and earthy language of his early work, framed as a camp screwball comedy but shot through with merciless satire. As his native Spain struggles against austerity, it's a timely dissection of deceit and wilful forgetting

By Maria Delgado

Spoiler alert: this article gives away plot twists

The playful opening credits of Pedro Almodóvar's new film *I'm So Excited!* (*Los amantes pasajeros*), created by graphic designer and 1980s underground icon Javier Mariscal, allege that the film is fiction, a fantasy that bears no relation to reality. But it is an assertion that should be taken with a pinch of salt. It may be set almost entirely in the bubble of a plane suspended in mid-air, but *I'm So Excited!* is anything but escapist entertainment. It ostensibly functions as a screwball comedy, with nods to Luis García Berlanga's acerbic films of the 1950s, but it is a feature grounded in Spain's political actualities and, arguably, celebrates the need for playful pleasure and excess at a time when politicians can only respond with the bland, uninspired discourses of austerity.

The film brings together a group of characters cocooned in the Business Class cabin of fictional airline Península's flight 2549, making its way from Madrid's Barajas Airport to Mexico City. A technical failure makes an emergency landing necessary, only there's a United Nations security summit at Barajas, so return is no longer an option. While they wait for news from air-traffic control on where they might bring the plane down to safety, a trio of male air stewards try to keep the cockpit and cabin entertained.

Drawing on the conventions of theatrical farce, the action is largely confined to a single interior location. The cabin is styled in a more muted colour scheme than the primary shades that dominated Almodóvar's earlier comedies. Here, red is restricted mostly to the piping on the seats and the trio of air stewards' baby-blue shirts, and is evident in the theatrical curtains that separate business and economy-class cabins, in the carmine lipstick of a wronged woman and the scarlet summer dress of her dramatic nemesis. The dominant palette of pastels

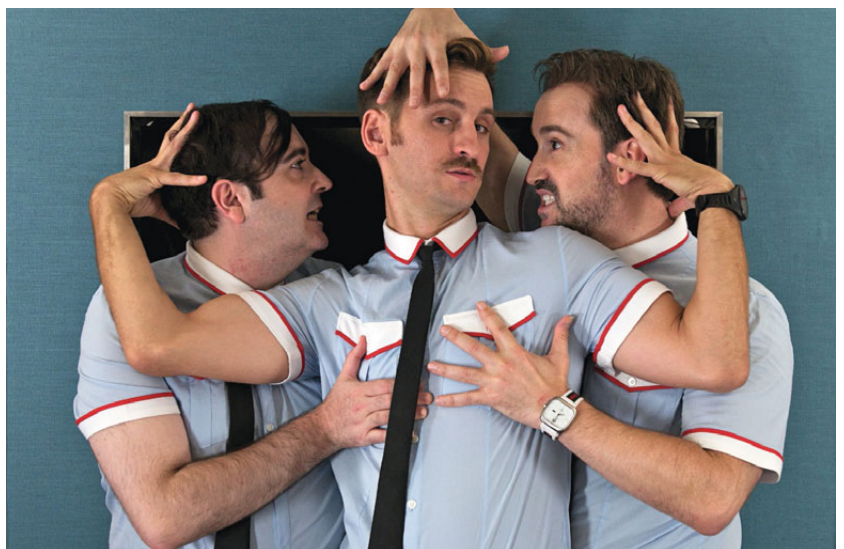
gives the film a retro feel that positions it in a mythical space between the black humour, systematic distortion and disfiguring anti-naturalism of Spain's *esperpento* tradition, 1980s pop cinema and the classic comedy of transformation. The latter traditionally sees characters escaping conformity to find release, albeit temporarily, from outmoded norms of behaviour while learning something about themselves in the process.

All of the film's characters have something to hide. Norma Boss (Almodóvar regular Cecilia Roth) is a failed actress turned dominatrix with a powerful client list and an inflated sense of her own importance. There is something of the Barbra Streisand-Carol Burnett hybrid in her self-conscious appearance; early on in the film she is spotted, as if in disguise, peering irately from her seat at the stewards. Her high-flying companions include shady businessman Más (José Luis Torrijo), embroiled in a major financial scandal and intent on leaving the country without drawing attention to himself; womanising actor Ricardo Galán (Guillermo Toledo) – *galán* is the Spanish term for a leading man in theatre and cinema – who is travelling to Mexico to shoot a soap opera and escape responsibility for his emotionally disturbed girlfriend; a recently married couple (Miguel Ángel Silvestre and Laya Martí) who are carrying some illegal substances to spice up their honeymoon; Infante (José María Yazpik), a hitman posing as a security advisor whose ostentatious urbanity, inky hair and slick suit reference the macho men of *Reservoir Dogs* (1991); and the wistful psychic Bruna (Lola Dueñas), heading to Mexico to help with the disappearance of a number of Spaniards involved in drug trafficking.

These are all knowingly theatrical types, larger-than-life characters whose self-conscious performance registers owe much to the lively generation of



MOTLEY CREW
Above: the pilots are confronted by passengers (left to right) Norma Boss, Infante, Más and Bruna. Below: the honeymooning couple and, far right, the stewards



1950s actors deployed by two directors much admired by Almodóvar: Berlanga and Fernando Fernán-Gómez.

The expressionless face and impassive look that characterised Antonio Banderas's suave surgeon in *The Skin I Live In* (*La piel que habito*, 2011) has here been replaced by a shameless carnality and lurid expressivity. The three gay air stewards – this is Almodóvar's most overtly gay film since *Law of Desire* (*La ley del deseo*, 1987) – function as a chorus of sorts: a trio of picaresque adventurers commenting on the predicament of the passengers while throwing their own amorous intrigues and obsessions into the narrative mix. The indiscreet chief steward Joserra (a svelte Javier Cámara), incapable of keeping a secret, is having an affair with the plane's pilot Alex (Antonio de la Torre), a married father-of-two who isn't prepared to go public with their relationship. His two deputies, purse-lipped Ulloa (Rául Arévalo) and the superstitious Fajas (Carlos Areces), offer little in the way of constructive advice, instead throwing their own mix of fear and paranoia into the crew's attempts to keep the passengers distracted and entertained.

Almodóvar cultivates a topsy-turvy world; at times the camerawork literally emulates the plane's movement to plunge the viewer into the cabin space, creating an arena for revelry and fantasy where anything is possible. The baby-blue walls of the cabin interior suggest a child's nursery and the idea of regression, infantilisation and play is evidently central to the director's handling of his skeletal plot. The trio of stewards perform an expertly choreographed safety routine, dancing to the donning of life-jackets while the opening and closing of the red curtains that separate the different parts of the cabin lend a theatrical sense of purpose.

SHAKESPEARE IN BUSINESS CLASS

Theatrical enterprise appears central to the film. Key here is the appropriation of pivotal tropes from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play that similarly dismantles archaic models of authority in a fairyland setting where magical makeovers are matched by erotic gameplay. The love potion of Shakespeare's comedy is refashioned by Almodóvar. Economy-class

Key here is the appropriation of pivotal tropes from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', a play that similarly dismantles archaic models of authority

passengers and their flight attendants have been given a tranquiliser to send them to sleep while the trio of enterprising air stewards – the Rude Mechanicals of Shakespeare's piece – amuse business-class passengers with anecdotes and escapades. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Mechanicals put on a play; here, moved by a similar creative impulse, they present a choreographed dance routine to The Pointer Sisters' 1984 hit 'I'm So Excited', which Almodóvar shoots in a manner worthy of Busby Berkeley as legs kick, heads peer out and curtains open and close with a boisterous sense of timing.

In Almodóvar's hands, Shakespeare's elixir becomes first tequila and then a cocktail, *agua de Valencia* [Valencian water], comprising vodka, champagne and orange juice with synthetic mescaline – the illegal cargo of the honeymooning Groom – thrown in for good measure. As the intoxicating beverage is consumed by passengers and crew, confessions and revelations tumble out.

Bacchanalian sexual encounters take over the cabin: the sleepy, dishevelled Bride fellates the Groom; Joserra and Alex escape to the lavatory; Ulloa 'comforts' the unhappily married first officer Benito; while the wistful clairvoyant stalks the Economy cabin in search of a stud male with whom she can lose her virginity – a sequence scored by Alberto Iglesias's snake-charming soundtrack. Codes of decorum effectively fall away. Suspended in time and space, intoxicated and deprived of their mobile phones and social media, the characters cross the boundaries that normally govern their behaviour. Their progressively dishevelled hair and clothing testify to the collapse of polished appearances.

Bit by bit, Almodóvar exposes the destructive games his characters play. The selfish womanising of actor Ricardo Galán is revealed through the public phone he uses to ring his on-off girlfriend Alba (Paz Vega), only to find that she is contemplating suicide perched on the side of Madrid's Segovia Viaduct. In a coincidence worthy of classic screwball comedy, the phone falls from her hand and into the basket of another of this Don Juan's exes, Ruth (Blanca Suárez) – her open face, short fringe and bouncy ponytail visibly referencing Audrey Hepburn. This temporary foray away from the plane serves to highlight Ricardo's irresponsibility while also offering a brilliant cameo to Carmen Machi – in matching aqua outfit and eyeshadow – as his inquisitive concierge (a role patented by the iconic Chus Lampreave in previous Almodóvars).

THE POLITICS OF DECEPTION

I'm So Excited! is, in so many ways, a film about the politics of deception. Alex and Benito have sham marriages; unbeknown to his new Bride, the Groom is transporting recreational drugs; Norma protects herself by alleging ownership of a collection of videos implicating 600 of her clients in compromising behaviour. Más is a financier whose Guadiana Savings Bank has

UNHAPPY LANDINGS

The deserted airport at La Mancha where the plane finally lands echoes Spain's illusory construction boom, during which vast projects were completed that fell into disuse within years





Plane speaking: Pedro Almodóvar puts the crew through its paces on board the fictional *Península* flight 2549, almost the sole setting for *'I'm So Excited!'*

THE RHYTHM OF COMEDY

The fantastical airborne satire 'I'm So Excited!' blends two traditions of comedy: American screwball and the Mediterranean school

By Pedro Almodóvar

There is humour in all my films; at times comedy bursts into other genres, embodied in one of the characters. Forgive the self-quote, but Agrado (Antonia San Juan) in *All About My Mother* [1999] and Paca (Javier Cámara) in *Bad Education* [2004] fulfilled that function. When they appear in a scene, they bring comedy with them and impose themselves on the general tone of the narrative. As a writer and director, I really enjoy those kinds of incursions and it has taken me time to impose them in dramatic films – especially knowing that Anglo-Saxon critics are less flexible when it comes to accepting a mix of genres, something as natural in life as it is in cinema. From when you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night, you move through various, sometimes opposing, genres. Since the start of my career that is how I've understood cinematic narrative.

A script isn't finished until the film has opened. I rehearse a script as if it were a play. Coincidentally, both *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *I'm So Excited!* seem like plays; in both the action

takes place mainly on one set. I rehearse them like plays, but I don't film them like plays (I've never directed a play: I don't know what it's like). They're very oral comedies – the action is based in the words and the characters' openness.

Theatre-style rehearsals aim to achieve another key element in comedy: the rhythm, the timing. Timing in comedy is not like rational time. When the actor gives his reply, he hasn't had the physical or mental time to assimilate the previous line, but he has to deliver his at full speed. No one is going to wonder if he's understood what was being said, and it's a bad sign if a spectator does wonder. Within comedy, the style that teaches you about rhythm (as do all of Woody Allen's films, but I think that's because he's in a hurry) is screwball, the crazy American comedy. Think of *Midnight* (Mitchell Leisen), *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor), *Bringing up Baby* (Howard Hawks), *The Palm Beach Story* (Preston Sturges), *Ninotchka* and *To Be or Not to Be* (Ernst Lubitsch), *Easy Living* (Mitchell Leisen), *Sullivan's Travels* (Preston Sturges) – any comedy where the comeback is delivered by Cary Grant, Carole Lombard or Katharine Hepburn. Marilyn is a goddess of the genre, but she had her own rhythm, a lethal rhythm. Seductresses in general need that rhythm

In the Mediterranean school, the women and men are made of flesh and blood. They shout a lot, they lose control

in order to seduce. Marlene Dietrich, even when directed by Lubitsch, never managed to talk quickly. They are the exceptions. Beautiful stars, male or female, aren't usually good comic actors. Let's add Sophia Loren and Penélope Cruz to the list of exceptions. Both are gorgeous and they can also talk at breakneck speed but, of course, one passes as a Neapolitan and the other is from Alcobendas.

I'm a great admirer of the Spanish school of acting and the Mediterranean school in general. I wouldn't include them in the screwball style (in the 1930s and 40s Spain wasn't in any condition to make crazy comedies; our tragic reality only allowed for cinematic escapism via quaint, traditional, very honourable comedies). In the Mediterranean school, what dominates is the characters' passion, carnality and openness, as if the characters don't respect themselves or others. This characteristic is something that suits comedy very well. The women and men are made of flesh and blood. They haven't been to the hairdresser's and they shout a lot, they lose control – it seems they're going to devour each other even though afterwards everything is resolved as it should be, in bed. They are less elegant than the Anglo-Saxons but sexier. This closeness to the earth and reality allows the Mediterranean school to talk about social problems with humour, laughing at life's limitations and tragedies, letting light and laughter break through the blackness. A maestro who worked with the greatest local exponents of this way of acting was Luis García Berlanga. He was unclassifiable and unique.



Almodóvar's characters are potent similes for an irresponsible generation whose vanity brought the country to the point of bankruptcy



swindled millions of clients out of their savings. While Almodóvar wrote the film before Spain's former Bankia chairman Rodrigo Rato was called to Spain's High Court (along with 32 current and former officials from the bank) to answer questions on fraud and the falsification of accounts, the ongoing case is a potent offscreen backdrop to the action.

Bankia is Spain's fourth-largest bank, created by the socialist government in December 2010 through the merger of seven ailing *cajas* [savings banks] hit badly by the toxic assets generated when the property bubble burst two years earlier. The Spanish government's bailouts of the bank in May and September 2012 failed to curb the culture of haemorrhaging, with losses of €19 billion registered in 2012, six times those of 2011. In Spain *I'm So Excited!* went on general release on 7 March amid press reports that Bankia shareholders stand to lose practically all of their invested capital in what looks to be a fraudulent overemphasis of the market value of its loans. So while shady Más decides to return and face the music following his inflight ordeal, no such accountability is in the offing for Bankia's unlucky investors.

As unemployment hits 26 per cent and painful austerity measures take their toll – including savage cuts to culture spending which include a rise in VAT on cinema tickets from 8 per cent to 21 per cent – there appears to be little governmental appetite to tackle institutional corruption. The Bankia scandal rumbles on, while the ruling People's Party is tainted by the revelation that Luis Bárcenas, its former treasurer, amassed €22 million in Swiss bank accounts, overseeing a widespread culture of bribes to politicians from senior figures in the construction industry. The terms 'recession' or 'economic crisis' are conspicuously absent from the film, but the Guadiana plotline offers pertinent comment on a society where patronage, politics and public administration are inextricably interwoven.

The metaphor of a society flying around in circles without actually going anywhere is hugely relevant to *I'm So Excited!*. The plane lands at La Mancha airport, an empty, ghostly space of pristine floors and mirrored surfaces that manifestly references the high-profile 'white elephant' airports of Ciudad Real and Castellón. The former, 150 miles south of Madrid, was closed in 2012 after just three years in operation; the latter was ini-

tially unable to secure a licence because its runway failed to meet EU regulations. These derelict spaces are the public wastelands of a nation inebriated by the frenzy to construct at any price. Almodóvar's intoxicated characters are potent similes for an irresponsible generation whose vanity brought the country to the point of bankruptcy.

I'm So Excited! paints a society indelibly scarred by secrets and lies. Lola Dueñas's pensive psychic is en route to Mexico to try and locate the bodies of Spaniards who have disappeared in mysterious circumstances, a possible reference to Spain's own 'disappeared' from the Civil War and its aftermath, thought to number 100,000. Javier Cámara's Joserra mentions his own involvement in a pact of silence that echoes that of the Spanish nation in relation to the crimes of the Franco era, when he tells the tale of a man who was suffocated by his fellow passengers. To a greater or lesser degree, all the passengers are somehow implicated in a pact of silence and deception in which the relationship between truth and lies cannot easily be prised apart.

I'm So Excited! will not be to everyone's taste, but this is an extra-ordinary film for the extraordinary times Spain is currently living through. Almodóvar consciously recycles elements, characters and lines of dialogue from his earliest work. Characters talk openly of desire and dicks, of fellatio and fucks. The uncompromising exchanges, the sexual puns and adoption of caricature hark back to his first film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980). There is a nod to the final sequence – again set on a plane – in *Labyrinth of Passion* (*Laberinto de pasiones*, 1982), while and the stylish reprocessing of camp, kitsch and Spanish 1950s cinema was previously evidenced in *Dark Habits* (*Entre tinieblas*, 1983). The tone of the new film owes more to the in-your-face verbal excesses of these early films than to the *noir*-ish melodrama of 2009's *Broken Embraces* or the lithe quickfire dialogue of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, 1988).

The phantoms of Madrid's *movida* may run through *I'm So Excited!*, but this promising generation is shown in the film to have now either been put to sleep – like the passengers in economy class – or been allowed to run riot without any sense of social responsibility.



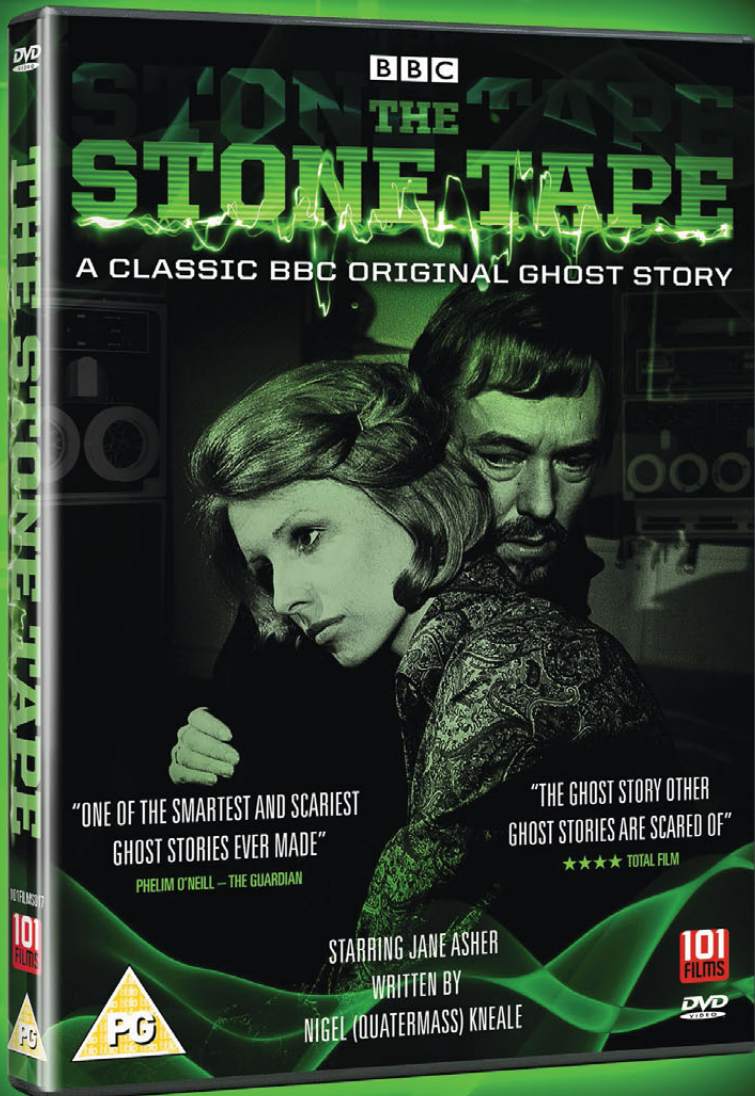
'I'm So Excited!' is released in the UK on 3 May, and is reviewed on page 96

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
Paz Vega and Blanca Suárez play the girlfriend and former lover of actor Ricardo, each seeking different ways to move on from a relationship based on vanity and lies

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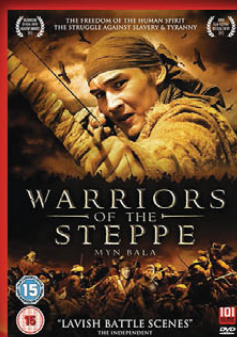
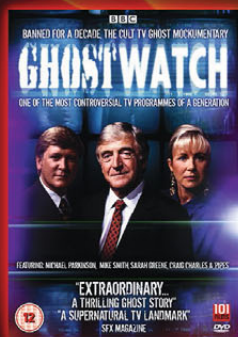
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DRIFTER'S ESCAPE

A *Palme d'Or*-winner in 1973, the downbeat road movie 'Scarecrow' sidestepped the early-1970s vogue for countercultural hokum and, for its director Jerry Schatzberg, has hardly aged at all. Back in cinemas this month, it stands up as a heartfelt study of friendship and faint hope

By Peter Tonguette

He emerges out of nowhere: a middle-aged man, sporting a cap and swaddled in sweaters, ambles distractedly across a hilly, unpeopled field that could have been painted by Andrew Wyeth. He carries with him only a suitcase and a sour expression. The first glimpse we have of Max (Gene Hackman) in Jerry Schatzberg's *Scarecrow* – which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year – defines his character: cross, mistrustful and alone.

Max eventually reaches a seemingly empty road, where he encounters another man, who has been watching Max just as we have. From his perch, between two branches of a tree, he looks like an owl, but in fact he is named for another species: Lion. That's what Max rechristens Francis (Al Pacino) when the two men later become business associates. In the opening scene, however, such an alliance seems all but impossible. Dodging tumbleweed, Max and Lion set themselves up on opposite sides of the road as hitchhikers competing for a ride. They go about it quite differently. When a truck rudely races by without stopping, Max screams obscenities born of genuine frustration while Lion (gently imitating Max) yells silly gibberish. At dusk, the two finally commune over a cigar; when Lion sees that Max's lighter is shot, he draws him across the road by offering his. One of the most touching of movie friendships commences.

Schatzberg became involved in *Scarecrow* because of a friendship of his own. It had been only two years since he had cast Pacino in the leading role in *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), the second film for both men. Nonetheless, Schatzberg assumed that when Pacino had Garry Michael White's screenplay sent to him, the actor was merely looking for creative input from a former director. "I thought that he had it sent to me just to read it so he could discuss it with me, just for his own work, which he likes to do," Schatzberg tells me now, remembering the film 40 years on. In fact, Pacino wanted Schatzberg to make the film, which had begun life at United Artists as a vehicle for Bill Cosby and Jack Lemmon. "Of course, it would have been a different film," Schatzberg says politely. By the time Schatzberg got involved, the project had migrated to Warner Bros with Hackman and Pacino to star. "Evidently the two actors didn't get along with the director originally attached to it," Schatzberg says. "When I said I liked it, my agent said, 'OK, we're going to send you to LA to meet Hackman and see if you get along,' and obviously we did."

Soon Max and Lion's backgrounds become a little less opaque: they are drifters, and since the film takes place in the early 1970s, largely in the western United States, we may be forgiven for presuming that they are participants in the counterculture. As it turns out, White's screenplay gives them particular histories which severely delimit their exposure to mainstream American life during this period: as the film opens, Max has just ended a six-year prison term in San Quentin, while Lion is a navy man who has been at sea for nearly as long. Perhaps that is why *Scarecrow* has not dated. "The interesting thing – and I like it when people tell me – is it doesn't seem to have aged," Schatzberg comments. "It could've been this year's film. Maybe I'm just being a little proud of it."

Max subscribes to an ethos that is more Adam Smith than Timothy Leary; no "turn on, tune in, drop out" for this would-be entrepreneur. "Wanna go into business?" he asks Lion, who can barely spit out an answer before Max starts outlining the car wash they will run in Pittsburgh. The workload will be split between them, though it will bear the boss's imprimatur: Maxy's Car Wash. In spite of his tenuous position in society – no home, no family, no record of professional success – Max preaches good old-fashioned thriftiness, oblivious to the irony that the money he has been dutifully saving was earned behind bars. "I believe in America," says the man at the start of 1972's *The Godfather* (the Pacino film sandwiched between *The Panic in Needle Park* and *Scarecrow*) – and so does Max.

The two set out from Bakersfield, California, with stops in Denver (to see Max's sister) and Detroit (to see Lion's child) on the way to Pittsburgh, the promised land. It was a path that Schatzberg and his crew (led by cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond) followed: the film was shot roughly in the order of the story. "Maybe on a day-to-day basis, we may have reversed scenes," Schatzberg says. "But when we started out, they were on the road, and that was the way it went." Even though *Scarecrow* focuses on Max and Lion, its visual scale is the opposite of a chamber piece: "I started late in both photography and in filmmaking," says Schatzberg, a former fashion photographer. "So my films have a little bit more grandeur than if I had really started out young doing underground films."

Schatzberg stayed close to his Bronx roots on his first two films, the New York-set *Puzzle of a Downfall Child*



YELLOW BRICK ROAD
Lion (Al Pacino, left) and Max (Gene Hackman, right) hit the road in 1973's 'Scarecrow', directed by Jerry Schatzberg, below





(1970) and *The Panic in Needle Park*, but on *Scarecrow* the director found himself criss-crossing parts of the country he had never seen before. “I do the same thing in my photographs,” he says. “If I’m going to do a portrait of somebody, I like to talk to them for three-quarters of an hour or an hour to find out who they are, or what they are, or what’s open for me to explore.” Later films would take Schatzberg to the South in *Honeysuckle Rose* (1980) and Tunisia in *Misunderstood* (1984); all are marked by a lived-in quality. As a fashion photographer, he explains, “I kept moving away from the obvious poses, the obvious ways of working with models. I started to make them real. I’d have them running across the paper. Because when you wear the clothes, you have to show that you *can* wear the clothes. Well, I feel that also in the scenes I do in film.”

The actors enjoyed making a film in continuity. “It’s closer to doing a play,” Schatzberg points out. “When you make a film, it’s like being in a time capsule. You go from the beginning to the middle, to the end, to the beginning.” But his prior association with Pacino, which

was responsible for Schatzberg becoming involved in the project in the first place, hovered over the production. “Hackman let us know right at the beginning that he was paranoid about the fact that Al and I had worked on a film together,” Schatzberg says. Early one morning, Schatzberg decided to shorten a dialogue-heavy scene with Hackman and Pacino, inviting the ire of Hackman (whom Schatzberg calls “one of America’s great actors”, and with whom he collaborated again on *Misunderstood*). As Schatzberg tells it, “He says, ‘Oh, fuck.’ I said, ‘What’s the problem?’ He said, ‘No, no. Let’s go, let’s go. Let’s do it.’ I said, ‘Come on, come on. Let’s talk.’ We were in a location where there’s an alley. I said, ‘Let’s go into that alley. We’ll talk about it.’ He said, ‘Yeah, he comes, too’ — meaning Pacino. We got in there and he says, ‘I am sick and fucking tired of you guys deciding the night before what my dialogue’s going to be!’ The irony is that I decided at the very beginning of the film that I wasn’t going to socialise with either one of them at night.” Ever the diplomat, Schatzberg acquiesced and shot

‘Scarecrow’ began life as a United Artists vehicle for Bill Cosby and Jack Lemmon. ‘It would have been a different film,’ Schatzberg says politely



THE LION'S TALE
Pacino, left, had worked with Schatzberg on his previous film, which created tension with co-star Hackman, right



the scene as written, but when he got into the editing room he realised his instinct was right and he made his cuts there.

A going-away party on their last night in Denver turns into a scuffle that ends with Max and Lion in jail. Holding Lion responsible, Max takes what amounts to a vow of silence. Being driven to work on a prison-run hog farm (an intentionally degrading job arranged by an unhinged fellow inmate played by Richard Lynch), Max passes Lion, who has drawn cushier work, and stares him down with a look of both hatred and grief. How, his eyes ask, could my trusted partner in Maxy's Car Wash have done this to me? Yet Schatzberg films the moment with quiet restraint. Similarly, when Max gets into a fight with the inmate, the camera is so far away from the action that their punches are barely audible, and as they wrestle each other to the ground, their falls are broken by little bushels of hay. "We know what's happening," Schatzberg explains. "We see everything without seeing it."

Out of jail, Max quickly refocuses on the car wash but Lion must take care of business in Detroit, where he left his wife and a child whose gender he doesn't know – he was in the navy before it was born. In spite of his absentee parenting, however, Lion is shown to be as eager to join the straight-and-narrow as Max. Preparing for his reunion, Lion has a short haircut befitting a military veteran; before contacting his abandoned family, he finds a church to kneel in prayer. Yet Schatzberg assiduously avoids the most obvious pitfall of the audience spending so much time in the company of Max and Lion: that we will overlook their terrible flaws. So, when Lion calls his wife (Penelope Allen), who has not heard from him in five years, Schatzberg tends to stay on close-ups of her even when it is he who is doing the talking. This striking editing choice renders the content of their conversation ambiguous: she claims that she lost their child, cruelly blaming the miscarriage on his absence, but we see a young child with her as she talks. Is it Lion's? Is it her new husband's? Is she trying to make a point?

In any case, Lion has a nervous breakdown in Detroit's Belle Isle Park – another sign of his scruples, and a tour de force by Pacino. In a dank hospital corridor Max pleads

with an unconscious Lion to wake up. It has taken the whole film, but we finally realise that when Max represented himself as a loner, it was a bluff. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote: "One must be a fox in order to recognise traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves." Max needs his Lion as armour against the world. Besides, they have to get their car wash up and running. The film ends with Max at a train station, barely able to scrape together the fare to continue on his own, and we wonder if he has left Lion for good.

"I always thought he was going to come back for him," Schatzberg says. "I've had friends of mine ask me that. And these same friends, one of whom who became a priest, said, 'No, I don't think he's going to come back.' I always thought he was going to come back. But that's my optimism. I'm always somewhat optimistic."

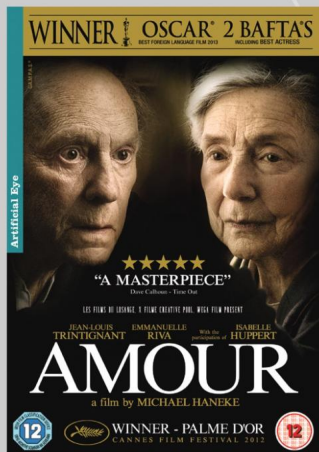
During its production, Warner Bros executives John Calley and Ted Ashley supported *Scarecrow*, but the studio's commitment waned after it was released. "I think the first two weeks did record box office," Schatzberg says. "And then Warner Bros came out with *The Exorcist*, and that was where the money was. They just dropped it like a hot potato, and that means something." The studio didn't even get on the bandwagon when the film was invited to Cannes: "They were pushing about six of their new films that hadn't come out yet. They also had two films that were invited in competition, and they thought that probably *O Lucky Man!* might win the prize or *Day for Night* might win the prize, and so they paid no attention to *Scarecrow*. *O Lucky Man!* had a big party. *Day for Night* had a big dinner. And we had a little dinner." Schatzberg got the last laugh, however, when *Scarecrow* walked away with the Palme d'Or.

For a long time, the director would wait 15 or 20 years after making a film before revisiting it, but this one – and its pair of misfits – had a hold on him from the beginning. "I do like it and, as a matter of fact, I like it so much I've written a sequel," he says, adding, "It's 30 years later. They own a *very* successful car wash, but they're still two fish out of water."



'Scarecrow' is rereleased at BFI Southbank, London and other UK cinemas on 26 April

We did record box office in the first two weeks. And then Warners came out with 'The Exorcist' and they just dropped 'Scarecrow' like a hot potato



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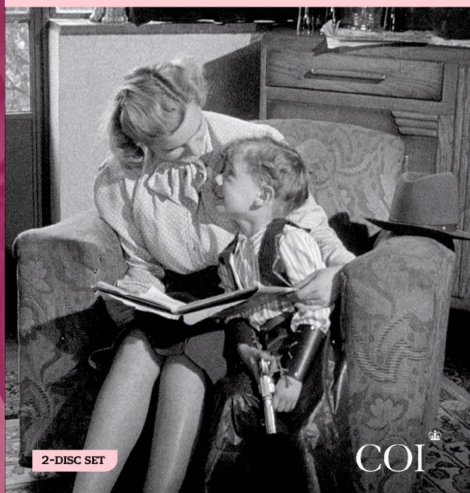


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MOMENTS OF TRUTH

With nods to both neorealism and cinéma vérité, Francesco Rosi's tense thrillers and crime procedurals have probed the darkness at the heart of Italian public life for 40 years. But don't call him a 'political' filmmaker.

By Peter Cowie

Francesco Rosi was born 90 years ago in Naples. His father headed a sail-boat company but was also a photographer and a cartoonist. During the late 1920s, Rosi Senior submitted a photograph of the boy to a Jackie Coogan lookalike competition organised by MGM; he won. As a young man, Francesco was chosen by Luchino Visconti to be an assistant on his semi-documentary about a Sicilian fishing community, *La terra trema* (1948). Between winning the MGM competition and working with Visconti, Rosi's only other professional experience of the cinema was accidentally burning an entire reel of René Clair's *Le Million* (1931) during a film-society projection.

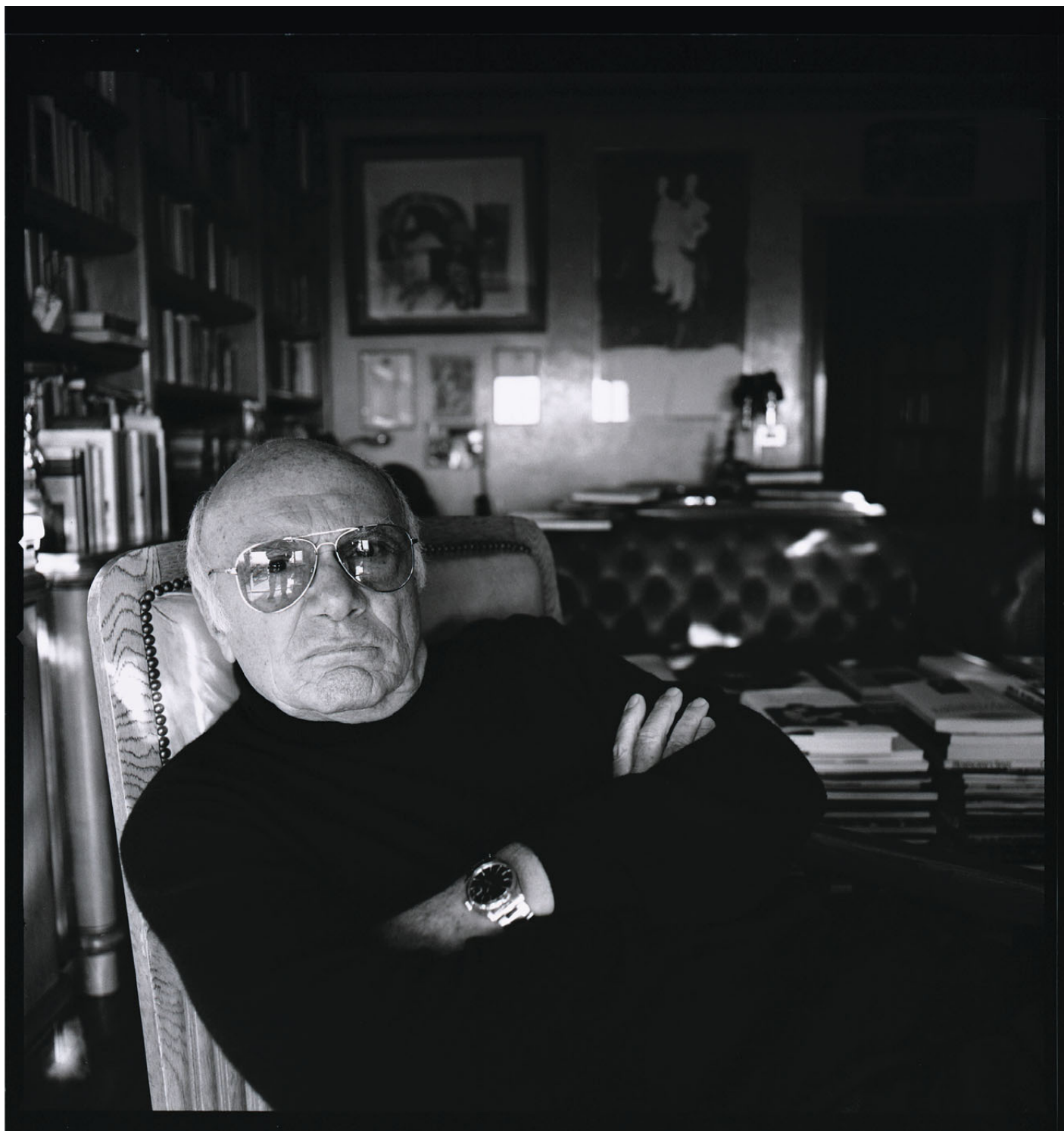
Though nurtured by neorealist masters, Rosi imitated neither the emotionally charged approach of De Sica nor the operatic form so dear to Visconti. Instead his films steer a course between neorealism and *cinéma vérité*. Appalled by southern Italy's poverty and incensed by the venality at its root, Rosi brought a forensic energy and passion to his analysis of power and corruption in such films as *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), *Hands over the City* (*Le mani sulla città*, 1963) and *The Mattei Affair* (*Il caso Mattei*, 1972). These works are imbued with an aggressive vitality, their narratives thrust forward in a quest for a mirage-like 'truth'. His cinema constantly questions but never preaches and his editing creates the kind of suspense you see in American political thrillers of the time such as *Seven Days in May* (1963), *The Parallax View* (1974), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Marathon Man* (1976).

A typical full-blooded Rosi thriller grips its audience from the outset. At the start of *Hands Over the City* an entire block of flats collapses into a busy street. Who is

responsible? The event reverberates throughout a film that condemns property speculation with a ferocity even Ken Loach might strive to match. The opening scene of *Salvatore Giuliano* shows the corpse of the eponymous bandit (played by the uncredited Pietro Cammarata) spreadeagled in the harsh sunlit glare of a Sicilian village street. It's a perplexing image to which Rosi returns again and again. Who killed this young and immensely powerful bandit? And how did they get to him? The electrifying prologue in *The Mattei Affair* plunges us into the aftermath of a plane crash in which Italian oil magnate Enrico Mattei has perished. Using a handheld camera and ultra-long lens, the cinematographer Pasqualino De Santis darts among the rescue teams as they search during a rainstorm for remnants of the aircraft. Was the crash due to bad weather, to engine failure or to a bomb? Rosi likes to use such immediate dramatic imagery to arouse the curiosity of the spectators, to keep them hooked.

Unlike films that campaign directly against war, racial prejudice or graft in high places, Rosi's cinema reveals the abuse of power without offering a solution – the term 'political film' for him is anathema. He prefers a dialectical procedure, laying bare fault-lines in political systems "in such a way that the public can be informed and at the same time have the chance to reflect on the issues". He rejected both the trite convenience of the happy ending and the striving after a kind of proletarian poetry that mars so much of early-1960s British cinema.

Like Antonioni and Pontecorvo, Rosi was almost 40 before he achieved international recognition. His debut feature and first vision of his native Naples, *La sfida* (1958) – about a small-time cigarette smuggler who tries to muscle in on Camorra-controlled produce markets – suffers from a melodramatic tendency that would recur (just the one time) with *Lucky Luciano* (1973). He found his touch more surely with *I magliari* (1959), about the partnership of two Italian immigrants in Hamburg. Mario (Renato Salvatori) is the young new arrival, and Tonnotto (Alberto Sordi) the swindler who



COMPLETELY FRANK
Francesco Rosi refuses
to offer trite solutions to
injustice, preferring instead
a questioning, forensic
dissection of power and
vested interests



The strength of Rosi's cinema is that all power is inscrutable, endowing it with a universal relevance that spreads far beyond Italy's borders

◀ takes the boy under his wing to hustle a living at the margins of Germany's post-war economic miracle. The presence of the vampish British actress Belinda Lee playing the love interest gives this gritty apprentice effort something of a *noir*-ish flavour.

But it was *Salvatore Giuliano*, Rosi's third feature as a solo director, that established him as a new force in contemporary cinema. Giuliano as a living, breathing man is barely glimpsed during the film, which adds to the mystique of his reputation as a Sicilian Robin Hood. Elusive among the hills and caves, he indulges in kidnapping and extortion in close collaboration with the Mafia. Rosi is less interested in his personality than in ascertaining how the bandit functioned and how he was finally betrayed. "My first preoccupation," Rosi told me in 2001, "was to recount the story of the man... and also the nature of the Sicily – even the Italy – of that period so as to denounce the hidden links between the power of the state, the power of the country's institutions and the power of the Mafia. Corruption percolates through every level of authority, from the highest government echelons to the simplest local policeman. The film is a kind of quest for the truth: an approximate search, too, because even today we do not know the whole truth."

Salvatore Giuliano won the Silver Bear for Direction at the Berlinale in 1962, but Rosi's worldwide reputation would not be established until *Hands over the City* won the Golden Lion in Venice in 1963. The film tackles property speculation and land development and the struggle between political expediency and moral conscience. Eduardo Nottola (Rod Steiger) lusts for control over the urban sprawl of Naples, a hunger suggested by the huge maps of the area adorning the walls of his penthouse. He relishes his mixed status as public councilman and private developer. With elections in the offing, the right wing need Nottola to secure victory and protect their interests. One councillor, De Vita (Carlo Fermariello), dares to protest against Nottola's disregard for urban regulations and human safety. The arguments between them, whether in the council chamber or in the chaos of a building site, underscore Rosi's anxiety about the dissipation of justice in a modern industrial context. He sees the political will of a great city being sapped and emasculated.

Rosi and his fellow screenwriters Enzo Forcella, Raffaele La Capria and Enzo Provenza offer their characters every shade of rhetoric, from the desperate pleading of De Vita to the silken eloquence of the mayor, De Angelis (Salvo Randone), who cherishes a private chapel in his

house and tells a doubting candidate: "The only true sin is losing." Rosi choreographs the fevered comings and goings in the council chamber with telling close-ups and Olympian overhead shots that rhyme with the aerial views of the city during the credits sequence.

HITTING HIS STRIDE

Rosi's early 1960s flourish was followed by a less-noted period that takes in *The Moment of Truth* (*Il momento della verità*, 1965), *More Than a Miracle* (*C'era una volta*, 1967) and *Many Wars Ago* (*Uomini contro*, 1970), before the turn of the decade saw the director hit his best form with *The Mattei Affair*.

A real-life figure, Mattei (Gian Maria Volonté) began his working life as a waiter in Naples but ended the war as a partisan commander. In 1945, he was made head of Agip, the Fascist-created state oil body, with orders to close it. He refused and staked his future on the discovery and exploitation of methane gas. By 1953 he had become the Italy's oil supremo, merging Agip with the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI). Mattei's charisma and negotiating skills broke the monopoly of the "Seven Sisters" (his term for the 20th century's dominant oil companies) and enraged the Americans by insisting that Italy should retain 75 per cent of the profits from its oil reserves, some four decades ahead of a similar move by Venezuela's Hugo Chávez.

Links between the death of Enrico Mattei and the shooting of John F. Kennedy often enliven conspiracy debates. The killings occurred less than a month apart; rumours at the time suggested that American oil interests had arranged for the Italian Cosa Nostra to eliminate Mattei because he posed a threat to their cartel. In 1970, Rosi enlisted journalist Mauro De Mauro to investigate the magnate's demise. De Mauro travelled to Sicily and located a tape of Mattei's last speech; eight days later he vanished, never to be found. A number of police officers involved in the De Mauro case were subsequently killed. Rosi, however, pressed ahead with his film, which left little doubt that Mattei had become too dangerous to American interests and had paid with his life.

Deftly switching from reconstructed highlights of Mattei's rise to power to the present-day inquiry into his death – led by Rosi himself – the film attains an almost uncomfortable *verismo*. Rosi sees him as a lonely, authoritarian individual who regards the Americans as "high-handed buffaloes" and whose cavalier idealism renders him a state within the state. We are reminded



continually of the power of the media, with multiple screens packed within a single frame reminiscent of Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). Orgasmic geysers of methane gas, surging into the air near Piacenza and flaming over the Tunisian desert by night, signify both Mattei's lust for energy and the natural resource so coveted by the great powers. When Mattei visits the town of Gagliano in Sicily, the heaving crowds embody the adulation surrounding him. Like Mussolini before him and Berlusconi after him, Enrico Mattei knew how to woo people with flamboyant rhetoric.

Lucky Luciano echoes *Salvatore Giuliano* with its analysis of the Mafia's rise to dominance in Sicily and then in the United States. Journalistic indignation and meticulous documentation again enliven Rosi's work, but life and conviction lose out to the film's disconcerting switches of time and place. The sequences in America seem clumsily directed and the dubbing, always a handicap for Italian films, is execrable. Yet the chief culprit may be the subject himself: a personality too gentle and, perhaps, lackadaisical to justify Rosi's strident style.

Illustrious Corpses (*Cadaveri eccellenti*, 1976) is more a political thriller than a docudrama. Rosi's most suspenseful film, it unmasks the crypto-fascism ingrained in the higher echelons of Italy's judicial system during the Giulio Andreotti era, when the ties between the government and the Mafia appeared closer than ever. Based on a novel of savage irony by Sicilian author Leonardo Sciascia, *Illustrious Corpses* follows the efforts of police inspector Rogas (played by an impassive Lino Ventura) to solve a series of perplexing murders. Three senior magistrates have been assassinated in 20 days; the closer Rogas comes to the truth of the conspiracy, the more vulnerable he becomes. The film opens and closes on a note of death, and with the crimes still unexplained. The stench of hypocrisy in high places finds a visual equivalent in the rubbish piled up in the town streets.

The film's most unnerving moments occur during the inspector's conversations with two of the doomed magistrates. One is the paranoid Judge Rasto (Alain Cuny), clearly following the orders of an unseen power clique; the second is none other than the president of the Supreme Court (Max von Sydow), who tells Rogas, with ineffable complacency, that judicial error does not exist. He compares the pronouncement of justice to the celebration of the sacrament. Once again, as in *Hands over the City*, the Church is a bulwark for the establishment.

The state's iniquity lurks behind the pomp of

authority, whether it be the head judge clad in scarlet finery or the ominous solemnity of a funeral procession for one of the magistrates. The only hope for the future seems to lie in nature itself; seconds before his murder, the aged procurator played by Charles Vanel – one of Rosi's favourite actors – pauses in a sunlit street and gazes at the flowers on a wall as though recognising their life and innocence.

Illustrious Corpses was dismissed by some leftist critics in Italy as being too abstract. That, however, is precisely the strength of Rosi's cinema: that all power is inscrutable. The film's refusal to incriminate individuals, focusing instead on an abstract evil, endows it with a universal relevance that spreads far beyond national borders.

Rosi's influence on others can be seen first in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Gillo Pontecorvo's unblinking view of the French failure to contain the uprising in the Casbah, and then most notably in the works of Costa-Gavras, many of which employ the mechanics of suspense to analyse political abuse: see *Z* (1968), *Confession* (1969), *State of Siege* (1973), *Missing* (1981), *Amen* (2002) and last year's *Capital*. Rosi's *mise-en-scène* also left an abiding impression on Francis Coppola. The 'boardroom' scenes in both *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974) are shot in much the same way as the committee gatherings in *Hands over the City*, creating a mood of smugness and collusion.

The sense of individuals being manipulated, even swept away, by unseen forces predominates in almost all of Rosi's work, whether it's the bullfighter in *The Moment of Truth*, who succumbs to the pressures of fame and fortune; the young lieutenant in *Many Wars Ago*, who questions in vain the absurdity of war and the misguided strategy of his superiors; the siblings in *Three Brothers*, each with his fear of death or ineffectiveness in the face of social problems; the murder of Santiago in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1987); the idealistic young mayor of New York confronted by Mafia power in *To Forget Palermo* (*Dimenticare Palermo*, 1990) – and, of course, the tragic figures of Carmen and Don José in *Carmen* (1984).

Still feisty in his 91st year, Francesco Rosi may have ceased making films but, so long as injustice and corruption hold centre stage, his legacy will endure. Few filmmakers have been able to reconstitute reality on screen in such a persuasive way, and it's appropriate that his final film *The Truce* (*La tregua*, 1996) should deal with another great Italian creator, Primo Levi, and his triumph in surviving Auschwitz. ☹

CRIME SCENES

From far left to right: death in the sun in 'Salvatore Giuliano' (1962); the Hamburg-set 'I magliari' (1959); expediency and conscience clash in 'Hands over the City' (1963); 'The Mattei Affair' (1972)

EYE TUNES

As a new exhibition traces the history of the pop video and its cross-fertilisation with cinema back as far as the 1920s, the form itself is at a crossroads in an age of YouTube and falling record-company revenues

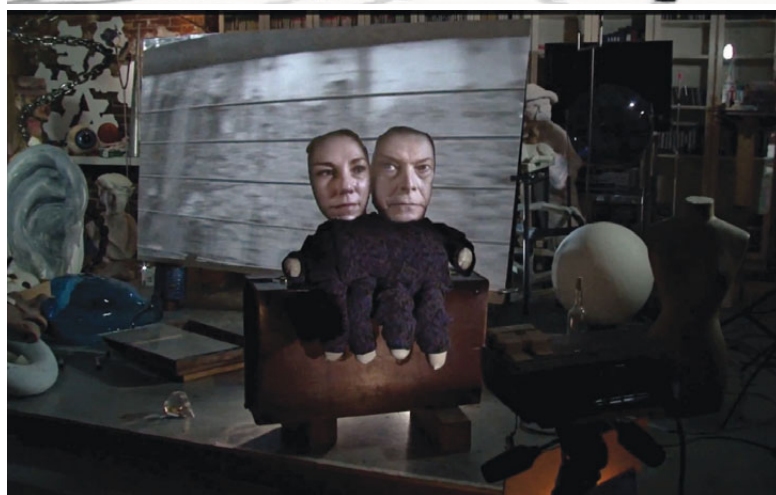
By Sam Davies

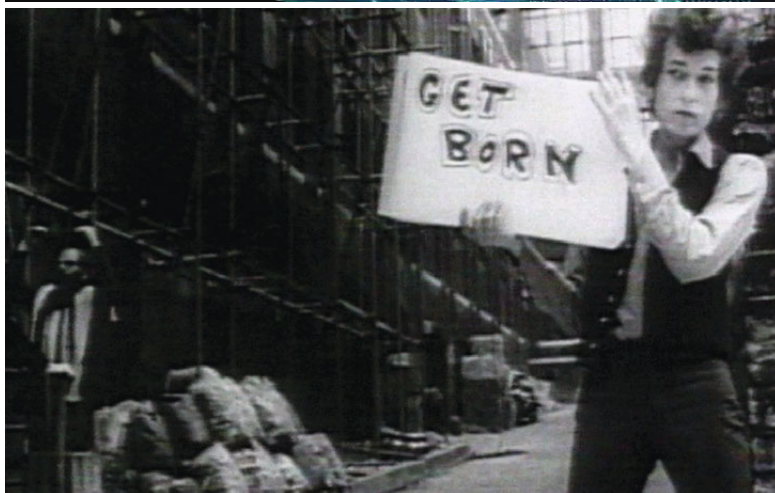
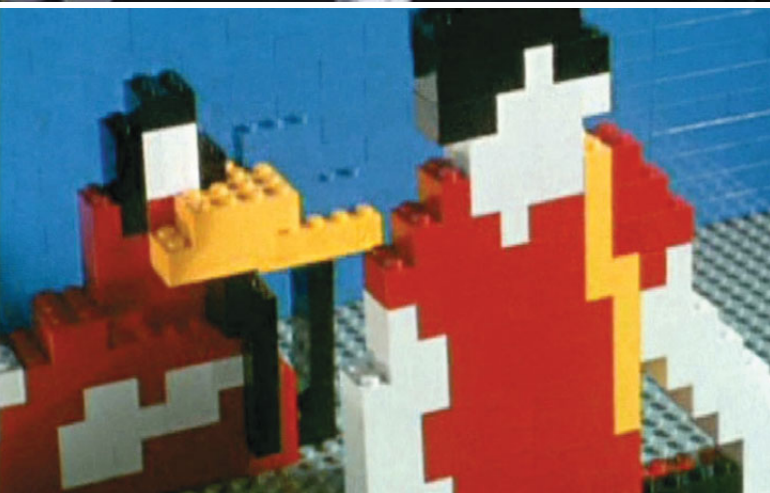
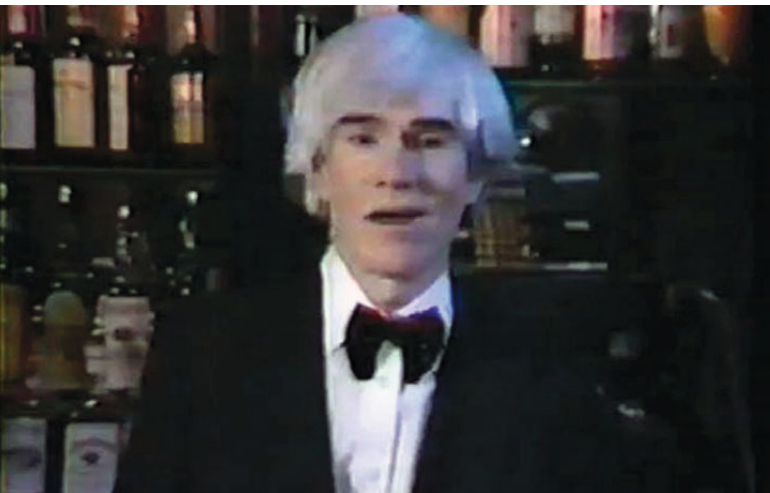
The music video has an uncertain, even vexed status culturally. It's easily and often disregarded: it is in essence an advert – a fact that even Radiohead, a group with a long history of serious engagement with the format, acknowledged in the sardonic title of their own 1998 video compilation *7 Television Commercials*. And there is arguably something second order about the video from which it can never escape: it's always an adaptation, an interpretation, a supplement. To an extent it even overlaps with the position of exploitation cinema: largely low-prestige and left to engage in wild button-pushing to snare audiences. At different times the video form has gladly tapped into the taboo (Madonna's 'Like a Prayer'), the pornographic (Mötley Crüe's 'Girls, Girls, Girls', Eric Prydz's 'Call on Me'), the violence of the video nasty (The Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up'), and more art-school-accented provocations (Romain Gavras's *Punishment Park*-referencing video for M.I.A.'s 'Born Free').

Yet as demonstrated by 'The Art of Pop Video' exhibition at Liverpool's FACT, this is a form whose earliest history began with ambitious fusions of modernism, music and cinema. It has provided the launchpad for major feature directors (many of whom continue to produce promos), including such names as David Fincher, Jonathan Glazer and Spike Jonze. And the music video has always drawn in talent from the art world, with Andy Warhol directing for The Cars (1984's 'Hello Again'), or Tony Oursler making promos for Sonic Youth (1990's 'Tunic (Song for Karen)') and most recently David Bowie ('Where Are We Now?'), to name just a few. ➡

CLIPS WITH EVERYTHING

Left to right, top row: Jake Nava's 'Single Ladies', Andy Warhol's 'Hello Again', James Frost/Aaron Kolbin's 'House of Cards'; 2nd row: Tony Oursler's 'Where Are We Now?', Michel Gondry's 'Fell in Love with a Girl', D.A. Pennebaker's 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'; 3rd row: Hype Williams's 'The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)', David Fincher's 'Vogue', Spike Jonze's 'Weapon of Choice'; bottom row: Howard Greenhalgh's 'Go West', John Landis's 'Thriller', Jonze's 'It's Oh So Quiet'







◀ The exhibition's deep historical perspective is one of its main strengths; for a start, it comprehensively deflates the much-repeated myth that Bruce Gowers's promo for Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975) represents the moment of the music video's birth. The exhibition sits the liquid shimmer of Man Ray's 1926 short *Emak Bakia* alongside Dudley Murphy's 1929 film of Duke Ellington's 'Black and Tan', but could quite easily have added to its playlist another Murphy collaboration – with Fernand Léger and George Antheil on *Ballet mécanique* (1924) – or René Clair and Erik Satie's *Entr'acte* (1924). Len Lye's short *Rainbow Dance* (1936), produced for the GPO Film Unit, is a particular highlight, its vivid, kaleidoscopic tumble of colour, shape and silhouette anticipating styles as distant in time from the 1930s as 60s psychedelia and the summer-bright primary colours of 80s pop and New Wave. The selection makes abundantly clear that as soon as sound became available, filmmakers wanted to illustrate and interpret it – that aspiring to the condition of music was a dream not only for writers but for directors too.

It was in the 1960s that the music video solidified into its most commonly recognised form as a film accompanying a pop song for promotional purposes. In France, stars of *yéyé* and pop – Françoise Hardy, Serge Gainsbourg, Jacques Brel – made short films for the Scopitone, a kind of visual jukebox. And as British pop boomed, so too did the video: with groups like The Beatles unable to make enough live TV appearances to meet demand,

short promotional films began to be used as stand-ins. The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, David Bowie and others followed suit.

While The Beatles' long-form features – *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Help!* (1965) and *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) – all had easily extracted sequences, the 1966 single 'Paperback Writer' and its B side 'Rain' had their own stand-alone shorts made. The 1967 promo for 'Strawberry Fields Forever', directed by Peter Goldman, has been normalised now through familiarity, but at the time it was a drastically un-'pop' gesture in borrowing all kinds of avant-garde tropes: abrupt jump cuts, reversed film and a John Cage-style prepared piano as a central prop which the group drench in paint. It sits on a throughline from the modernist interest in musical film earlier in the 20th century to the conventions of the pop video today. Just as film genres like horror or the thriller work as portals through which modernist music reaches a general commercial audience, the music video is the filmic genre through which experimental or expressionistic visuals, free from the demands of naturalism, narrative and character, can meet the public with the least friction.

In this sense the music video can offer a kind of laboratory space in which directors can experiment and create effects that then feed back into feature cinema. Music videos have always borrowed liberally from film: as affectionate parody, sincere tribute and blatant theft. But the current of influence is not entirely one-way. David Fincher's promo for Madonna's 'Vogue' (1990) revels

PROMO PROGENITORS
Clockwise from top left: films as diverse as 'Entr'acte', 'Rainbow Dance', 'Magical Mystery Tour' and 'Top Hat' fed into the evolution of the pop video

in the nitrate gleam of Art Deco monochrome, while 'Bad Girl' (1993) remakes in miniature the scenario and tone of Richard Brooks's *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977). Yet Fincher's first two features, *Alien 3* (1992) and *Se7en* (1995), have a very different and quite specific palette: their muddy sepias are more of a piece with Sam Bayer's endlessly played and equally murky 1991 clip for Nirvana's '(Smells Like) Teen Spirit'. Later the debt to Michel Gondry's use of still-camera effects in his video work was explicitly acknowledged by the effects team of *The Matrix* (1999).

'The Art of Pop Video', however, focuses more on film's influence on video rather than the reverse. Its section on the function of dance in videos, for instance, could easily have been taken up just with the dialogue between screen musical and pop video. Many of the classic set pieces of musical theatre have been retroactively granted a kind of music-video status, so often have they been quoted and referenced in the mirror held up by pop promos. Compare Fred Astaire's title number in *Top Hat* (1935) and John Landis's video for Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' (1983), in both of which the star leads a pyramid troop of dancers fanned out behind them; or Martin Scorsese's video for Jackson's 'Bad' (1987) and its nods to the tribal dance wars of *West Side Story* (1961). Gene Kelly's 'Singin' in the Rain' sequence may be his most famous, but it's his gravity-defying routine in *Royal Wedding* (1950) that's drawn on in the 1986 clip for Lionel Richie's 'Dancing on the Ceiling' (all three were directed by Stanley Donen).

Björk, The Dandy Warhols and even Aphex Twin have all mined the musical's physical vocabulary. Perhaps the most stunning recent example is the 2008 video for Beyoncé's 'Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)', directed by Jake Nava. Made at the last minute with minimal budget and just two dancers flanking the star, it gives the impression of a single-camera, single-take document of a performance that's almost superhuman in its effortless physicality. Yet the video – which Kanye West crashed the stage of 2009's MTV Video Music Awards to declare (with good reason) "one of the greatest of all time" – was essentially an updating of a Bob Fosse-choreographed routine from 1969 called 'Mexican Breakfast'.

WIND OF CHANGE

Some key developments in the form's more recent history are glossed over in the Liverpool exhibition, in which the video's present and indications of its future are presented through a kind of tech-utopian prism. There is no hint of any troubling currents; instead there is a set of recent promos that take advantage of the internet's potential for interaction (Chris Milk's 'The Wilderness Downtown', which allows fans to personalise the video for Arcade Fire's 'We Used to Wait' by feeding in their own geographical data; the virtual spaces of HTML5 in Milk's '3 Dreams of Black' promo for the Danger Mouse/Daniele Luppi album *Rome*; or Mary Fagot's interactive video for Robyn's 'Killing Me', which scans for and reproduces key phrases from social media).

But in fact the pop video has spent much of the last decade in an increasingly precarious position, buffeted by two major changes that have yet to fully play out. The damaging effect of downloading on the music industry has had an inevitable knock-on effect, reducing market-

ing budgets and meaning fewer and cheaper videos. At the same time MTV has all but ceased to be a music-video channel, relegating its video playlists to the early hours and replacing them with reality-TV shows.

In the meantime YouTube has grown exponentially since its launch in 2005. With TV music channels retreating to the margins, YouTube (and its competitors such as Dailymotion) has become a kind of super-Scopitone of the 21st century: a visual jukebox that's both free and practically inexhaustible in its depth, but also experienced according to a very different logic. Videos are now far less often encountered as communal moments on *Top of the Pops* or music channels. Instead they are chased by the audience down the path of YouTube's opaque algorithms, which decide what to offer next as connected or related content. Brand-new videos are simultaneously and ubiquitously available, but they sit on the same level as the video archive, jostling it for space and losing viewers to older promos, to rare live performances, to re-edits by fans and home-made tributes.

This slow ebbing of money behind the scenes means a certain high watermark may already have passed in terms of pure spectacle. High-concept, big-budget, extended-play videos are still made, but increasingly they are the exception. A certain strand of hip-hop video has become ever rarer, namely the flurry made around the millennium for artists from the Ruff Ryders or Roc-A-Fella stables which are often written off as trashy materialism (thereby missing the subtlety and nuance with which they articulate a grammar of glamour, luxury and sensuous surface in their furs, chains and gleaming 20-inch rims). Director Hype Williams's output is certainly an omission on the part of FACT's curators: rather than populating his videos with superbikes or yachts, Williams – in his best work for

Music videos have always borrowed liberally from film, but the current of influence is not entirely one-way

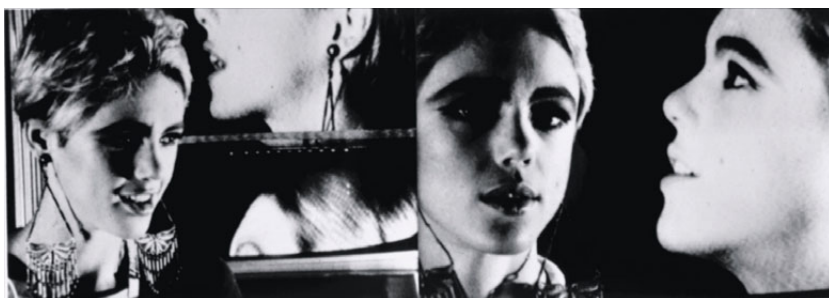
BREAKOUT
Jonas Akerlund's extended 2010 promo for Lady Gaga's 'Telephone' – also featuring Beyoncé, right – rivals the pop-video epics of the 1980s





As a bare minimum, a video can be little more than a camera pointed at the face of a performer – assuming he or she has sufficient charisma

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
John Maybury's 'Nothing Compares 2 U', top, and Godley & Creme's 'Cry', above, are famous examples of the close-up style that can be traced back to Warhol's 'Screen Tests', below



Missy 'Misdemeanour' Elliot, Busta Rhymes and others – has been hugely influential. Characterised by the use of fish-eye lenses that warp the performers across bulging screens, he was equally ready to warp video conventions in general, dressing Elliot in, essentially, a shiny black billowing binbag for 'The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)' (1997) and reinventing R&B and hip-hop choreography as something almost awkwardly angular.

The current queen of excess is Lady Gaga, who is never shy about her ambitions to match and surpass the titans of 1980s pop and MTV's peak years. Regardless of whether her music matches Madonna's or Michael Jackson's, her videos are extraordinary, near-delirious design visions. The orbital birth scene that opens Nick Knight's 2011 video for 'Born This Way' is an unholy cocktail of Jodorowsky, H.R. Giger and *Barbarella*. Directed by Jonas Akerlund, the long narrative into which 'Telephone' (2010) is stretched – taking in a women's prison, a road trip and a mass-poisoning at a diner – comes across as Lynch's nightmare logic filmed through the aesthetic of David LaChapelle: the subconscious of American pop culture poked with a stick and captured in images as glossy and plastic as PVC. It certainly makes Lynch's own foray into video look drab (his 1990 video for Chris Isaak's 'Wicked Game' is disappointingly conventional, and makes Herb Ritts's subsequent remake feel profoundly atmospheric by contrast).

Of course a three-and-a-half minute pop song does not always require a six-figure budget, and there is a distinct tradition within video history that makes the most of the space left behind by the bigger productions. Reacting against the bombast, pomp and circumstance of a Michael Jackson epic, there have always been videos like John Maybury's 'Nothing Compares 2 U' (1990) for Sinéad O'Connor, or Godley & Creme's 'Cry' (1985). As a bare minimum, a video can be little more than a camera pointed at the face of a performer – assuming he or she has sufficient charisma; if not, other ideas are easily brought in, and this kind of 'head-room' video is arguably a genre unto itself. Kevin Godley's 'Numb' (1993) for U2, Grant Gee's 'No Surprises' (1998) for Radiohead, Tom Kuntz's 'All My Friends' (2007) for LCD Soundsystem and Wendy Morgan's 'Cold War' (2010) for Janelle Monáe are just a few of the videos that have tapped into a simplicity of framing that can be traced back to Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* (1964-1966).

With music-industry revenues unlikely to recover anytime soon, videomakers will be increasingly dependent on ideas that catch and spread virally online. The video for PSY's 'Gangnam Style' is probably the largest-scale example of this happening, but another recent phenomenon to explode into millions rather than thousands of online plays – Baauer's 'Harlem Shake' – is surely a pointer to what will become a new kind of norm for the video form. Since an Australian comedy group first uploaded a short homemade clip of their own amateur dance routine to Baauer's track, hundreds of imitations and variations have swarmed onto video-sharing sites. The availability of DV, bedroom editing and online sharing means that increasingly the boundaries between the 'official' promo item and the fan-made tribute will begin to blur and disappear.



The exhibition 'The Art of Pop Video' is at FACT, Liverpool until 26 May



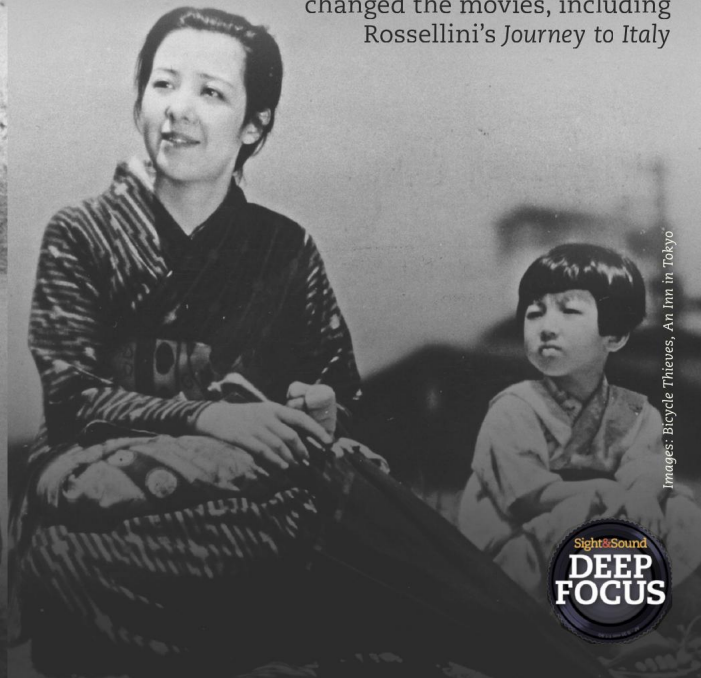
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Images: Bicycle Thieves, An Inn in Tokyo



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THE ROOTS OF NEOREALISM

Italian filmmakers in the immediate post-war period created their own cinematic language to capture the hardships of everyday life in a shattered nation. But though revolutionary in impact, the new realism was not a complete break with the past. Its roots went deep, to the work of directors in Italy and beyond which, over preceding decades, had prefigured the themes and formal innovation of a style that would become one of cinema's most influential movements



By Pasquale Iannone

One glance at the bookshelf of volumes dedicated to Italian neorealism might lead us to assume that there is very little left to say about what Martin Scorsese has called “the most precious moment in film history”. The proponents of this politically committed reaction to the glossy, studio-bound, Hollywood-influenced productions approved by Mussolini's regime were determined to take their cameras to the streets, to neglected communities and their surroundings, to show the ‘real Italy’ in all its diversity. Here was a new kind of cinema, one that returned to its roots, a people's cinema that chronicled the struggle against Nazism but also highlighted the hardship and upheaval of the post-war period. Of recent studies of the trend, Christopher Wagstaff's *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (2007) stands out, but there are two main areas that remain comparatively unexplored. First, much of the writing on neorealism (not only that in English) has tended to work with a restricted filmography of a dozen or so titles, focusing almost exclusively on the canonical trio of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti. Second, even after seven decades of debates on the subject, in-depth studies of the trend's origins are surprisingly few. We know more about

neorealism's own legacy than we do about some of the films that helped shape it in the first place.

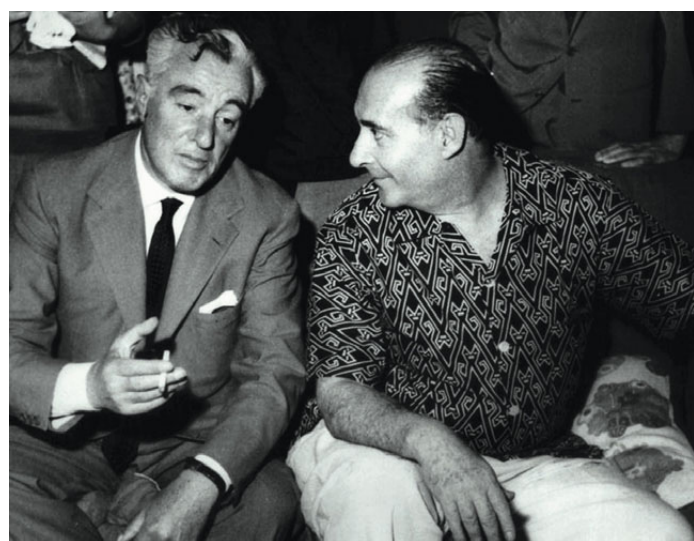
If it can be said that neorealism's political agenda and worldview were very much products of a specific time and place, the same certainly cannot be said of what are usually deemed to be its formal innovations. In aesthetic terms virtually nothing in neorealist cinema was new, from de-dramatised narratives to scrupulous use of real locations to the casting of non-professionals. Federico Fellini, in a revealing interview from 1961, reinforces the importance of aesthetics, arguing that “neorealism is not about what you show, but how you show it. It's simply a way of looking at the world without preconceptions or prejudices. Some people are still convinced that neorealism should only be used to show a particular type of reality – social reality to be exact. But then it becomes propaganda.” Admittedly Fellini was in defensive

We know more about neorealism's legacy than we do about the films that helped shape it in the first place

mode here, responding to critics who had accused him of betraying neorealism, but his remarks are more than valid. If we are to foreground style and tone, then there are a great many works that were neorealist *avant la lettre*, both in Italy and abroad.

Without trying to compile a definitive list, I'd like to explore 12 titles which, in various ways, can be said to have inspired, influenced and/or anticipated neorealism. Some of the films are acknowledged influences, such as Jean Renoir's *Toni* or Alessandro Blasetti's *1860*, whereas others – Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* and Ozu's *An Inn in Tokyo*, for instance – might seem more left-field choices. I also wanted to make room for works that appeared at the same time as neorealism and are very much in the same vein but are nowhere near as well known as they should be (Oliveira's *Aniki Bóbo* and Grémillon's *Le ciel est à vous*).

The first neorealist picture may have been made more than 70 years ago, but the trend still fascinates critics, scholars and filmmakers alike. Italian directors are still grappling with it, from veterans such as the Taviani brothers (*Caesar Must Die*, 2012) to those of the younger generation such as Matteo Garrone (*Gomorrah*, 2008 *Reality*, 2012). Later in 2013 one of the last



The pioneers: Vittorio De Sica, left, in conversation with Roberto Rossellini



A man alone: Carlo Battisti as De Sica's 'Umberto D'



Earth-shaker: director Luchino Visconti, who laid the foundations of neorealist filmmaking with his sweltering 1943 noir 'Ossessione'

surviving neorealists, 91-year-old Carlo Lizzani (*Achtung Banditi!*, 1951, *The Verona Trial*, 1962) will release a documentary entitled *We Weren't Only Bicycle Thieves*, which will include contributions from Bernardo Bertolucci, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott and Ron Howard, among others. Listing these famous names together makes you realise just how far neorealism's branches have spread; but what of its roots?

1 'The End of St Petersburg' ('Konets Sankt-Peterburga') (Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1927)
One of the famous theoretical debates of the 1940s set up a clear dichotomy between (Soviet) montage cinema and filmic realism. Coming down firmly on the side of realism, French critic and theorist André Bazin argued that montage cinema was didactic and manipulated the viewer into a particular point of view. On the other hand, realism and its stylistic devices such as deep focus and long takes helped the filmmaker maintain "an aesthetic of reality" without "imprisoning the viewer" – which Bazin argued was the case in montage cinema. Bazin's views have been argued over by generations of subsequent theorists, but it's interesting to note how the neorealists of the 1940s often had nothing but admiration for montage filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Alexander Dovzhenko and Vsevolod Pudovkin. One of the earliest Italian filmmakers to actually display the influence of Soviet cinema was Alessandro Blasetti, but later films such as Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948) also drew unmistakably from the montage school.

Like Eisenstein's *October* (1928), Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg* was commissioned to mark the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. It spans three years in terms of story time – from 1914 and the outbreak of World War I to the tumultuous events of 1917. As Vance Kepley Jr has noted in his 2003 monograph named for the film, "*The End of St Petersburg* explores the conditions that make seemingly powerless, unremarkable individuals into agents of historical change... Pudovkin sets forth a view of revolution that stresses personal empowerment." This foregrounding of the human aspect, this history-from-below perspective seemed full of expressive potential in the context of Italian post-war film. We can even see it in proto-neorealist works such as Blasetti's *1860*. Pudovkin may be deemed somewhat less radical in his montage experimentation than Eisenstein, but his greater focus on the interaction of society and the individual marks him out as a key forerunner of neorealism.

2 'People on Sunday' ('Menschen am Sonntag')

(Robert Siodmak & Edgar G. Ulmer, 1929)
Shot from July to September 1929, *People on Sunday* is very much a liminal work. It has often proved difficult for critics and historians to categorise the film, hovering as it does between popular and art cinema. The film presents problems for the auteurist critic too, given that it is the work of a collective. But what a collective: Robert and Kurt (later Curt)



History from below: 'The End of St Petersburg' portrays 1917 from the point of view of the powerless

Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer, Billy Wilder, Fred Zinnemann and Eugen Schüfftan all contributed to one of the great city films, a vibrant, sun-kissed snapshot of late-Weimar Germany.

After a quarrel with his wife, a taxi driver spends a lazy Sunday with a friend and two girls by the Berlin lakes. The four characters lap up the sun, take a swim, listen to music, have a picnic, ride a pedal boat and generally do all they can to enjoy a day away from the responsibilities of work. *People on Sunday* unfurls like a bridge between the avant-garde city film of the early 1920s and the neorealist cinema of the 1940s. It exudes a greater sense of human warmth than works such as Walther Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) or Alberto Cavalcanti's *Nothing But Time* (1926), but equally it makes a clear choice not to depict the conflict and hardships of life in the modern metropolis. Monday will come around soon enough, it seems to say; best to grab

Even in the context of 1930s French cinema, Renoir's proto-realist 'Toni' is startling in its sensuous immediacy

these last few precious moments of freedom.

Nearly all of the young filmmakers involved with the production of *People on Sunday* left for Hollywood in the 1930s, where discussions over who contributed what depended on which of them you happened to be talking to. The film's influence on post-war Italian cinema is undeniable – most pronounced, perhaps, in a lesser-known 1950 picture from Luciano Emmer called *A Sunday in August*. Emmer's film, which featured Franco Interlenghi from De Sica's *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscià*, 1946) as well as an early performance from Marcello Mastroianni, was considered the first example of *neorealismo rosa* ('pink neorealism'). This trend saw filmmakers continue to use many of the formal devices of neorealism while discarding its political agenda and drawing on popular genres such as comedy and melodrama. In reality, this had already begun with films like De Santis's *Bitter Rice* (1949) and, some might argue, goes as far back in the timeline of neorealism as Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943).

3 'Man of Aran' (Robert Flaherty, 1934)

"With Flaherty," wrote the pioneering John Grierson in his 1930s essay 'First Principles of Documentary', "it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location..."



Late-Weimar downtime: 'People on Sunday'



The drama of the seasons: 'Man of Aran'

His drama, therefore, is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year's seasons, of the fundamental fights that give his people sustenance." Grierson could just as easily have been talking about Visconti's second neorealist film *La terra trema* – a film clearly influenced by Flaherty, and in particular the Michigan-born filmmaker's *Man of Aran* (1934). Driven by a desire to use film to discover and reveal little known people and places, Flaherty's first film *Nanook of the North* (1922) remains one of the best-known documentaries of the silent era, and while the director would travel the world in subsequent decades, his preoccupations remained those of his debut: the dangers of nature and the struggle of communities for survival.

In 1934, with a limited budget provided by producer Michael Balcon, Flaherty shifted his

focus to the islanders of Aran, off the west coast of Ireland, to make the film that, more than any of his others, would be criticised for its supposed 'distortion'. *Man of Aran* was deemed to be more about Flaherty's vision of life than life as it was, but of course his films were always highly personal and his work – perhaps more than that of any of the documentary pioneers – has much to say about the subjective nature of the form. *Man of Aran* featured a soundscape created entirely in post-production; this was partly down to logistics, but the final result imbued the images with a lyrical, poetic quality. In aesthetic terms, it was far ahead of the vast bulk of fiction films of the time. More than a decade after *Man of Aran*, Visconti would find himself having to answer the same kind of criticisms as Flaherty for his portrayal of a Sicilian fishing community in *La terra trema*.

4 'Toni' (Jean Renoir, 1935)
Any discussion of the roots of neorealism cannot fail to take in the 1930s films of Jean Renoir. Coming roughly mid-point in a remarkable run of features that included *La Chienne* (1931), *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932), *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and *La Règle du jeu* (1939), Renoir's *Toni* is often regarded as the major precursor of neorealist cinema.

Shot in the summer of 1934, the film – like Visconti's *Ossessione* – is built around a *crime passionnel*. Italian immigrant labourer Toni (Charles Blavette) arrives in the French town of Martigues on the Mediterranean coast and moves in with his landlady Marie (Jenny Helia). Before long, however, he falls for the vivacious Josefa (Celia Montalvan), a Spanish girl whose marriage to a boorish foreman does little to dim Toni's passion. What is most striking about *Toni* is less Renoir's basic plot but his treatment of it – his attitude towards the material. Reflecting later in life on the film's influence on neorealism, the director himself shrugged off any direct link. "The Italian films are magnificent dramatic productions," he wrote in his memoirs *My Life and My Films*, published in 1974, "whereas in *Toni* I was at pains to avoid the dramatic... My aim was to give the impression that I was carrying a camera and microphone in my pocket and recording whatever came my way, regardless of its comparative importance."

Even in the context of 1930s French cinema, Renoir's film is startling in its sensuous immediacy. The Italian author and journalist Italo Calvino once wrote that the French films he devoured as a youngster in the 1930s seemed dense with natural odours, whereas Hollywood pictures "smelled of Palmolive, lustrous and antiseptic". Few other films of the time capture this better than *Toni*. The director's languid pans unobtrusively link characters to their (new) surroundings, while his innovative use of live sound makes a virtue of what was at the time still primitive cinematic technology. These two elements come together in many of the film's most memorable passages, such as the scene in which immigrant workers perform folk songs, their melancholy notes hanging in the balmy air.



Trees lounge: Celia Montalvan and Charles Blavette get intimate in Renoir's 'Toni'



5 *'1860'* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1933) In his inventive approach to both film form and content, Alessandro Blasetti was the key Italian filmmaker of the Fascist era. Not only was he a pioneer in his experiments with sound and colour, but he also dared to explore the limits of what could be depicted in mainstream film. This partly explains why, unlike many of his contemporaries, his reputation endured in the post-war period, even among the fervently anti-fascist.

Blasetti's started out as a critic in the early 1920s when he founded *Cinematografo*, the first Italian film magazine dedicated to technical and material aspects of filmmaking. He made his feature debut with *Sole* (1929), a celebration of rural regeneration which Mussolini himself described as marking the dawn of Fascist cinema. It is interesting to note that, while Blasetti's work found favour with the Fascist regime, his main formal influences post-*Sole* came from the Soviets. He particularly admired Nikolai Ekk, who made the first Soviet sound picture *The Road to Life* – a major success at the inaugural Venice Film Festival in 1932 – and continued to be an influence on Blasetti, especially on his breakthrough film *1860*.

A patriotic, realist 'history-from-below' chronicle of the unification of Italy, *1860* was described by historian Pierre Sorlin as "the most optimistic screen portrayal of the *Risorgimento*". It chronicles the popular protests that unfolded in Sicily both during and after Garibaldi's expedition to the island. Giuseppe Gulino (a non-professional) plays Carmineddu, a peasant who is dispatched by palermitano priest Padre Costanzo (Gianfranco Giacchetti) to meet Garibaldi in Genoa and inform him of the Sicilian uprisings. On his journey he meets a variety of bourgeois characters, each of differing political persuasions. After arriving in Genoa, he eventually joins Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand as it makes its way south; the film ends with the Battle of Calatafimi in the north-west of Sicily.

While *1860* is certainly an important Italian precursor to neorealism in its use of landscape and non-professional actors, the film's also notable for Blasetti's sophisticated use of sound, with the influence of Ekk especially coming to the fore. During Carmineddu's long, solitary journey by sea to the mainland port of Civitavecchia, the director evokes his protagonist's exhaustion under the blazing sun by superimposing shots of the sea and images of the port. These shots are accompanied by the clanging of tools and the voices of dock workers. We then cut to an interior where Carmineddu is questioned by local officials but is unable to understand a word (the town was then under French control). The camera moves towards a portrait of Napoleon III with French voices continuing on the soundtrack. Blasetti then match-cuts to a portrait of Maria-Sophia of Bavaria and the French voices become German. We are now back in Sicily where Carmineddu's wife Gesuzza (Aida Bellia) has been captured by Swiss soldiers hired by the Bourbons. In this brief passage, Blasetti highlights both subjective, individual experience and the divided state of pre-unification Italy to quite brilliant effect.



Red and black: *'1860'* was described as "the most optimistic screen portrayal of the *Risorgimento*"

6 *'An Inn in Tokyo'* (*Tôkyô no yado*) (Ozu Yasujiro, 1935)

Like many other countries, the sound film in Japan did not reach popular acceptance until well into the 1930s, with many directors initially hesitant to embrace the new technology. Only after the success of foreign talkies did companies such as Nikkatsu or Shochiku move decisively toward sound. Ozu would hold out until 1936's *The Only Son*, making more than 20 silents in just over five years, including *Passing Fancy* (1933) and *A Story of Floating Weeds* (1934). Both of the latter films feature Sakamoto Takeshi as Kihachi, a character who would return in *An Inn in Tokyo*, Ozu's final (surviving) silent picture.

The film tells of the plight of an unemployed father searching for work in and around Depression-hit Tokyo, his two young sons by his side. Thematically, there are many links to be made with De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* but, as David Bordwell has rightly noted, "*An Inn in Tokyo*

brings style into prominence through repetitive patterning and parametric variation." Rather than walking the bustling ancient streets of Rome, Kihachi and his boys roam a flat, industrial desert littered with giant spindles, gasometers and telegraph poles. Ozu returns again and again to shots of the three characters dwarfed by these looming signifiers of modernity.

In keeping with several of the director's films of the 1930s, *An Inn in Tokyo* foregrounds the vibrance and resourcefulness of children. While their father often appears (understandably) despondent, his two boys are playful and vibrant. It is no coincidence that the film's most heart-rending moments occur precisely when this enthusiasm is sapped. Throughout the film, the characters' few moments of happiness are unfailingly punctured by the harsh reality of their situation. When Kihachi reveals that he only has enough money for food or a room for the night, the sons choose food. Ozu cuts to



Tokyo drifters: Ozu's *'An Inn in Tokyo'* explores themes later found in De Sica's *'Bicycle Thieves'*

father and sons hungrily eating rice at a local inn. The two boys – worried that their food will be taken away before they get the chance to finish – literally hug their bowls as they eat. The scene anticipates a similarly poignant passage in *Bicycle Thieves* when father and son stop off at a trattoria for a meal they can barely afford.

Many familiar Ozu themes (and formal devices) can be found in this neglected masterpiece of 1930s cinema, with the director's depiction of the parent-child relationship wrapped, as ever, in an air of melancholy. *An Inn in Tokyo* is more than deserving of rediscovery, not merely as a precursor to Italian neorealism but as one of Ozu's most beautifully realised works *tout court*.

7 'Aniki Bóbo' (Manoel de Oliveira, 1942)

We seem to be running out of ways to describe the incredible longevity of Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira. At the time of writing the 103-year-old is working on his latest film *The Devil's Church*, after his previous work *Gebo and the Shadow* premiered at last year's Venice Film Festival. To put his miraculous achievements in context, we should remember that Oliveira was born in 1908, the same year as David Lean, Bette Davis, James Stewart and Anna Magnani, and that he made his feature debut more than 70 years ago, as his native Portugal was entering the second decade of Salazar's repressive regime.

As with cinema in Mussolini's Italy, the vast majority of Portuguese films of the time were conformist. Made in 1942, Oliveira's *Aniki Bóbo* was intended as a symbolic attack on his country's dictatorship. The film was based on Rodrigues de Freitas's short story 'Little Millionaires', first published in the pages of leading modernist journal *Presença* in the 1930s. It tells of the rivalry between two boys, Carlitos and Eduardinho, and their attempts to win over the same girl, Teresinha. Charismatic but also a bully, Eduardinho is the leader of a group of children who play on the banks of the Douro. His love-rival Carlitos seems to be his polar opposite. Shy and naive, he nonetheless lands what he thinks is a major coup when he steals a doll Teresinha has admired in a local shop; but this by no means signals the end of the competition between the boys.

In its unvarnished depiction of the lives of children – their playfulness but also their lies, deceit and cruelty – *Aniki Bóbo* anticipates both De Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946) and Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950), even though its urban landscape is perhaps closer to *An Inn in Tokyo*. Oliveira, like Ozu, purposely makes little attempt to recreate the bustle of city life. The depopulated streets of Porto in *Aniki Bóbo* allow Oliveira to make the contrast between the restriction inside and the freedom outside the classroom.

Adult authority, in the form of parents and schoolteachers, is viewed with great suspicion by Oliveira. Few adults are given names and we don't even see the face of Carlitos's mother, who appears in a handful of scenes, including a moment towards the end of the film when she wakes the boy from a nightmare presented by Oliveira in all its contorted, quasi-expressionist hysteria.



'Aniki Bóbo'

The main criticism levelled at *Aniki Bóbo* at the time of its release seems now to be the film's overriding strength: its depiction of childhood not as an idyll but as a world that can be just as tumultuous and unforgiving as adulthood.

8 'Ossessione' (Luchino Visconti, 1942)

While Rossellini and De Sica were concerned explicitly with chronicling the hardships of wartime and the post-war era, Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* – for many the very first neorealist film – drew on typically American genres (in particular the American *noir* and western) as well as Italian *cronaca nera*. Together with a group of young anti-fascist critics (Mario Alicata, Gianni Puccini, Giuseppe De Santis), the well-travelled aristocrat transposed James M. Cain's 1934 novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to the sweltering flatlands of the Po delta.

Visconti had spent several years in France in the 1930s, where mutual friend Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel had introduced him to Jean Renoir. Informally, Visconti joined Renoir's troupe as they moved from film to film, culminating in

'Ossessione' presents a sweat-drenched, earthy alternative to the polish of fascist-approved cinema

the unfinished short *Une partie de campagne* (1936). A short time later, Renoir was invited to Italy to lecture at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, but the outbreak of World War II forced him to abandon Europe for the US. He left behind a treatment he had written of Cain's novel and this was the basis of what later became *Ossessione*. In the film, wandering hobo Gino (Massimo Girotti) arrives at a roadside trattoria owned by the harmlessly garrulous Bragana (Juan De Landa). Having set his sights on Bragana's downtrodden wife Giovanna (Clara Calamai), Gino offers his services as a mechanic in exchange for room and board. Gino and Giovanna soon become lovers and hatch a plan to murder Bragana but, in typically *noir* fashion, things do not go to plan.

As with Rossellini's *Rome Open City*, Visconti cast two well-known Italian stars in the film's main roles. Massimo Girotti had made his international breakthrough as a 21-year-old in Alessandro Blasetti's historical epic *The Iron Crown* (1939), and went on to star in Rossellini's *A Pilot Returns* (1942). For the role of Giovanna, the director was so determined to cast Anna Magnani that even when the actress told him she was pregnant, he wasn't deterred. However, production of the film was delayed, meaning that Magnani had to eventually abandon the project. The role went to Clara Calamai, a prominent Italian star of the so-called 'white telephone' films of the 1930s and early 1940s. Under Visconti's remorseless direction, she was completely transformed from glamorous diva to slouched, worn-out adulteress.

From opening scene to pitch-black finale, *Ossessione* presents a sweat-drenched, earthy alternative to the polish of fascist-approved cinema. Most satisfyingly for the film's makers, when *Ossessione* was first shown in September 1943 an outraged Vittorio Mussolini stormed out of the screening, proclaiming "This is not Italy!" Visconti would go on to make a further two features in the neorealist style, finally getting to work with Anna Magnani on 1951's *Bellissima*.



Po Valley noir: Massimo Girotti and a de-glamourised Clara Calamai in 'Ossessione'

9 'Le ciel est à vous' ('The Woman Who Dared') (Jean Grémillon, 1944)

Even a cursory glance through the writings of French auteur Jean Grémillon reveals a sensibility that in several ways mirrored that of the neorealists. "Through images and sounds," he once said, "cinematic expression looks for the path that leads to neglected regions of human experience." Film, for Grémillon, was about looking beyond what could be perceived by the human eye. "The French realist," he argued, "looks at reality by combining childlike freshness and mathematical precision."

Grémillon had a background in classical music before he made his feature debut in 1927 with *Maldonne*. In a three-decade career straddling the silent and sound eras with equal assurance, he went on to make more than 50 features. His first talkie *Petit Lise* (1930) was a commercial failure but nonetheless featured a stunning use of sound (Henri Langlois later said it was the film that made him stop pining for silent cinema). Grémillon worked with some of the most famous names in French film, from actors Jean Gabin, Raimu and Madeleine Renaud to screenwriters Jacques Prévert and Charles Spaak. While Prévert wrote the screenplays for Grémillon's first two films made under the Nazi occupation, *Remorques* (1941) and *Summer Light* (1943), Spaak wrote the third, *Le ciel est à vous* (1944). It's the story of Thérèse Gauthier (Renaud), the wife of a former fighter pilot, who becomes obsessed with the idea of taking to the air in her own right and sets out to break the long-distance flying record. *Le ciel est à vous* is unusual for both its location shooting and its proto-feminist perspective. Its exaltation of human courage and determination impressed both Pétainists and resistance fighters (though as a committed resistant, Grémillon was no doubt more happy about the latter's approval).

While much has been written about directors such as Renoir, Carné and Vigo, Grémillon is crying out for rediscovery. It's particularly exciting, therefore, to see retrospectives of his work on the horizon at this year's Edinburgh International Film Festival and at BFI Southbank.



'Le ciel est à vous'

10 'Rome, Open City' ('Roma città aperta') (Roberto Rossellini, 1945)

Between 1945 and 1947, Roberto Rossellini made three films chronicling the final throes of World War II and its devastating immediate aftermath: *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania, anno zero* 1948). It was Rossellini's second war trilogy, coming after three pictures he made while Italy was still under fascist rule: *The White Ship* (1941), *A Pilot Returns* (1942) and *The Man with the Cross* (1943).

Rome, Open City was initially planned as a documentary on Don Giuseppe Morosini, a priest accused of resistance activity and executed by the Nazis, but as the project evolved, Rossellini and his collaborators (including Sergio Amidei and a young Federico Fellini) decided to broaden the film's scope so that the story of the priest became one of several narrative strands. They drew on other harrowing stories of life and death under the German occupation, including that of Teresa Gullace, who was shot while going to the aid of her husband.

Although Rome had been liberated, shooting conditions in early 1945 were difficult. Electricity supplies were erratic and curfews were still in place. Rossellini had been given funds by a local countess, but these quickly ran out. To finish the film he sold whatever personal items he could and made do with discarded pieces of film stock, including



'Rome, Open City'

material the Allies used to produce newsreels. Synchronised sound was also out of the question, so the film was shot silent with dialogue and sound effects added in post-production, together with Renzo Rossellini's score.

Helping to keep the project afloat amid myriad difficulties were two established personalities of stage and screen. Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani had already appeared together in two lighter, more comic portraits of Roman life: Mario Bonnard's *Campo de' fiori* (1943) and Mario Mattoli's *The Last Wagon* (1943). Rossellini himself was quick to acknowledge the importance of these films in the development of neorealism, especially in their small-scale, regional storytelling and their use of dialect. Fabrizi and Magnani's performances in *Rome, Open City* have been seared into film history – for Magnani in particular, it was the role of a lifetime.

11 'Bicycle Thieves' ('Ladri di biciclette') (Vittorio De Sica, 1948)

"My goal," said director Vittorio De Sica about his approach to *Bicycle Thieves*, "was to look for the dramatic in ordinary situations, the wonderful in the smallest, the tiniest news item, in the material everybody considers insignificant." De Sica had found the ideal collaborator in screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, with whom he wrote the majority of his films, including four defining classics of neorealism: *Shoeshine* (1946), *Bicycle Thieves*, *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, 1951) and *Umberto D* (1952). Zavattini, the pre-eminent theorist of neorealism, was often called upon to justify his and De Sica's apparent non-spectacle, the mundanity of their films. Their loose, episodic approach to narrative seemed to be the antithesis of tightly constructed, neatly resolved Hollywood narratives – but real life, they claimed, was not like that. Lives move forward, but they also meander, lose their way, double-back. It has to be said that the overall structure of a film like *Bicycle Thieves* does more to challenge Hollywood conventions than films such as *Ossessione* and *Rome, Open City*. It is closer, perhaps, to Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (significantly, both films feature child protagonists who oscillate between passivity and agency). Zavattini actually lamented the fact that he didn't go far enough with *Bicycle Thieves*; in fact his goal in subsequent years was to push this approach further. The results can be seen in *Umberto D*, most notably in the morning sequence famously lauded by André Bazin in a contemporary piece on the film.

The plot of *Bicycle Thieves* could not be simpler.



Wheels of misfortune: the impact of 'Bicycle Thieves' is in its unflinching portrayal of mundanity

In post-war Rome, husband and father-of-two Antonio Ricci (Lamberto Maggiorani) finds a job putting up advertising bills. To carry out his work, he needs a bicycle, which he manages to retrieve from the pawnbrokers. On the first day at work, his bicycle is stolen. The rest of the film follows an increasingly desperate Antonio and his young son Bruno (Enzo Staiola) as they scour the streets of Rome in search of what is essentially the family's lifeline. We therefore have what in the larger scheme of things is an 'insignificant' story, especially if we compare it to the mortal struggle against Nazi occupiers in *Rome Open City*. But as Bazin argued, "Rossellini's style is a way of seeing, while De Sica's is primarily a way of feeling." The moment when Antonio emerges from a tunnel in a wide-eyed, cold sweat and stares into a bustling, uncaring Roman street still has the power to make the heart sink.

Bicycle Thieves remains arguably the most famous neorealist work, but its production history (explored by Robert Gordon in a recent BFI Film Classics monograph) offers up a bewildering array of 'what-ifs'. Much has been written on the fact that David O. Selznick offered to finance the film, but only if Cary Grant played Antonio. "It might make us laugh now," said screenwriter Suso Cecchi D'Amico, "but Selznick's offer was taken very seriously and there was a high-level meeting about it."

12 'Bitter Rice' ('Riso amaro')

(Giuseppe De Santis, 1949)

Almost seven decades after neorealism's post-war heyday, the bulk of English-language writing on the trend continues to focus on the canonical trio of Rossellini, Visconti and De Sica. It may be that they engage more with genre or it may simply be down to availability of subtitled copies of their films, but directors such as Alberto Lattuada, Carlo Lizzani, Aldo Vergano, Pietro Germi and Luigi Zampa – all of whom made precious contributions to the development of neorealist cinema – are continually overlooked. Critic-turned-filmmaker Giuseppe De Santis shares this group's fate but stands out as the most iconoclastic of the so-called 'second-tier' of neorealists. His impassioned writing for the journal *Cinema* includes a famous piece called 'Per un paesaggio italiano' ('For an Italian Landscape'). In it, he praises Jean Renoir (and his 1938 film *La Bête humaine* in particular) for the very precise use of landscape to reflect character and emotion: "Renoir seems to tell us that there are some emotions that man cannot give voice to so we must draw on everything that surrounds him to express them." Of all the retrospective comments on the legacy of neorealism, De Santis's voice shines out. In a 1981 interview, he argued: "Even the most stubborn and faithful belief in pursuing the daily life of this or that character comes to naught if the director is not able to know himself, to choose and select, to give a particular look and sense to the most representative moments of this human condition."

De Santis's career in fiction film began with screenwriting credits on Visconti's *Ossessione* and Rossellini's *Desire* (1946). For his own first feature *A Tragic Hunt* (1947), he drew on the services of important figures



Fields of dreams: 'Bitter Rice' leavened neorealist veracity with sensual drama and an earthy glamour

such as Cesare Zavattini, Lizzani and none other than Michelangelo Antonioni. Funded by ANPI (the National Association of Italian Partisans), the film anticipates much of De Santis's subsequent cinema in its exploration of themes of ideological conflict through the prism of genre (in the case of *A Tragic Hunt*, the Hollywood crime/gangster film).

Two years later came the rush of wild, unabashed sensuality that is *Bitter Rice*, a picture that in content and tone is about as far from the world of films such as *Germany Year Zero* or *Umberto D* as it's possible to get. Perhaps most famous for a star-making appearance by 19-year-

old Silvana Mangano, De Santis's film centres around the fateful meeting of two couples in the rice fields of the Po valley. Famously, the romantic intrigues in the film itself were put in the shade by those behind the camera. Producer Dino De Laurentiis married Mangano shortly after the film was made while – shockingly – writer Cesare Pavese committed suicide after being jilted by Constance Dowling, sister of *Bitter Rice* actress Doris. Among the many visitors to the set was renowned photographer Robert Capa, who shot hundreds of behind-the-scenes pictures for magazine readers in the US. 📸

i These 12 films screen at BFI Southbank, London in May as part of the Sight & Sound Deep Focus season 'The Roots of Neorealism', which includes a panel discussion on 7 May chaired by Pasquale Iannone. See the Sight & Sound website for video links to this piece 🎬

David O. Selznick offered to finance 'Bicycle Thieves', but only if Cary Grant played the lead character Antonio

FOCUS

THE MAYORESS OF MOVIEDOM COME

Neither the USSR's strictures nor its downfall could get in the way of Kira Muratova's ongoing experiments in rupture

By Simon Merle

There's always something preposterous to claims that Kira Muratova ranks among the greatest filmmakers, even when it might simply be true. Because Muratova is not a household name – and her films remain almost impossible to see in the UK – such proclamations invariably sound smug. Not that the Ukrainian-based filmmaker is an unknown: when her latest, *Eternal Homecoming* (*Vечноye vozvrashcheniye*), had its world premiere in Rome last November, some devotees travelled hundreds of miles to be there; when Rotterdam honoured her with a complete retrospective this year, the screenings turned out to be among the biggest successes the festival had scored in some time, with people fighting every day to get tickets. Still, don't expect to see *Eternal Homecoming* open at your local artplex; even if it did, the regulars might freak out at the sight of something so relentlessly strange and absurdly tender, outrageous, playful, wacky, disquieting, curious, wistful and boisterous – something both

refined and garish, free-floating yet steely-willed, a wholly paradoxical creation. In that respect, the film is the sum total of Muratova's art.

In principle, Kira Muratova has the right pedigree for mainstream cultural acceptance: most of her solo works made during Soviet times were frowned upon officially – *Long Farewells* (*Dolgie provody*, 1971) got shelved, *Getting to Know the Big Wide World* (*Poznavaya belyy svet*, 1979) had only a limited release, and *Among Grey Stones* (*Sredi serykh kamney*, 1983) was re-edited in a fashion that made Muratova withdraw her name. Only *Brief Encounters* (*Korotkie vstrechi*, 1967) and the Somerset Maugham variation *Change of Fortune* (*Peremena uchaste*, 1987) came through almost unscathed. True, after her debut feature *Our Honest Bread* (*Nash chestnyy khleb*, 1964) – a poetic piece of post-Thaw Socialist-Realist filmmaking made in tandem with her then-husband Alexander Muratov – nobody expected any trouble from her; like the couple's medium-length thesis film *On the Steep Cliff* (*U krutogo yara*, 1961), *Our Honest Bread* is a typical early work, a pastoral about changing times that's full of gorgeous images, a bit brooding though essentially in accord with the system. Whatever one might say about Muratova's films, they were never openly critical of the USSR, because the questions she pondered went

beyond that one-sixth of the earth. Muratova was and has remained doubtful about human relationships. Mankind, for her, is too frail to carry something so grand as the world on its own. Which is to say that the triangle of her *Brief Encounters* – estranged middle-class couple and delightful ingénue – could happen in many countries; that the tensions between mother and son that are the dynamo of *Long Farewells*, as well as those between father and son in *Among Grey Stones*, are not rooted merely in the Soviet but in the civilised human condition; and that the torn temptress of *Change of Fortune* can be found wherever and whenever women have the opportunity to live for their passions. Maybe Muratova's most Soviet-specific work is the film many consider her masterpiece: *Getting to Know the Big Wide World*, about labourers in love on the construction site of a tractor factory. It sounds almost like something by that master of Stalinist musical comedies of the 1930s and 40s Ivan Pyryev – and, in a gleefully

Muratova's art is refined and garish at the same time, free-floating while steely-willed, a wholly paradoxical creation



Mother and son blues: 'Long Farewells'

twisted way, it plays at times as if Pyryev had reinvented himself in offbeat 60s avant-garde fashion. *Getting to Know the Big Wide World* is a brazenly eclectic mishmash of styles and tones, more a quilt of scenes than a story told from beginning to end; and while the narrative develops the way love stories tend to, the film, with all its aesthetic odds and ends, seems to run a course all its own. There would be more of that to come, in more extreme fashions.

Tellingly enough, Muratova's problems didn't end with the liberalisation of the late 1980s. *The Asthenic Syndrome* (*Astenicheskiy sindrom*, 1989), the film that put her on the world-cinema map, got into trouble at the time; glasnost certainly has its zones of darkness. Call it a paradox of Muratovian dimensions that the moment *Long Farewells* was made available, *The Asthenic Syndrome* was shelved, considered a dangerous disturbance by certain parties in power; haunted intimacy with incestuous undertones was on, furious X-rays of the nation's impossibly divided soul off. Partly because of that, Muratova (along with Aleksandr Sokurov) became glasnost's poster film artist: formerly suppressed voice – and a woman at that! – can finally make herself heard (with some coughs and hiccups). Indeed, Muratova has kept herself busy ever since, with a new feature ready every three years or so, as good an average as you could hope for when you make a cinema somewhat more demanding than most.

The Asthenic Syndrome introduces a strategy to Muratova's cinema that has become ever dearer to her through the decades: rupture. She likes to hack her stories into pieces. The patchwork quality of *Getting to Know the Big Wide World* already hinted at that will to break with narrative traditions, while the mutually exclusive worlds of father and son in *Among Grey Stones* look retrospectively like Muratova's first timid essay in doing a two-in-one narrative. With *The Asthenic Syndrome*, she does exactly that for the first time: the first part, shot in black and white, is a film watched by the protagonist of the second part, shot in colour. Does life imitate art when the later scenes recall moments from earlier in the film? Or are the scenes played out in the real world, which looks more like a nightmare populated by zombie versions of ordinary people, just there to tell us that art always knew, whether we like it or not?

Muratova elaborated that strategy with *Three Stories* (*Tri istorii*, 1997), *Chekhovian Motifs* (*Chekhovskie motivy*, 2002) and *Two in One* (*Dva v odnom*, 2007): in each of them, opposites or composites are turned loose on each other. The stories of *Chekhovian Motifs* complement each other in a rather disturbing fashion, as do the two halves of *Two in One*. None of these, though, has the sheer visceral power, the sense of urgency that made *The Asthenic Syndrome* such a shock to the system back in 1989 – they're more aloof, metaphysical. In that sense, *Eternal Homecoming* feels like the zenith of this strain in Muratova's cinema: the viewer is confronted with variation upon variation of two or three exchanges – the same dialogue delivered by very different people, played at times by the same actors (some of them Russian superstars, others amateurs) in settings that use and re-use certain props while covering



Onto the world-cinema map: 'The Asthenic Syndrome'



Strategies of separation: 'Three Stories'

the whole range of society, from lumpen dwellings to chalets. Only after a while does it become clear that these are screen tests for a film production that has run out of money and is now looking for investors. So, the *comédie humaine* played out thus far – the farce of man's foibles – turns out to be but a casting show of sorts. But the remarkable thing is that this doesn't devalue the experience. If life is but an afternoon spent in the cosmic screening room, among many others



Kira Muratova

doing almost the same thing, who cares, as long as it is me doing it? I might know that billions of others do just about the same, day in, day out, but I'm still the one doing it right here, right now. Every man an eccentricity, a frolic or jest. Carnavalesque, burlesque, grotesque Punch and Judy shows for adults – that's what Muratova's films are at their cruel, compassionate hearts.

Since *Passions* (*Uvlecheniya*, 1994), Muratova has often collaborated with writer-actress extraordinaire Renata Litvinova. But between *The Asthenic Syndrome* and *Passions*, she made another film that ranks for some as her finest achievement: *The Sentimental Policeman* (*Cuvstvitelnyy milicioner*, 1992), which is every bit as bitter and disgusted with the way the post-Soviet world has turned. There's more grime here than in any Muratova film since, more bile, more of a straightforward political purpose to her aesthetic of contradictions. Here, the perennial outsider is for once at one with the moment in a way she never was and never would be again. **S**

i 'Passions' and 'Chekhovian Motifs' are available on Region 1 DVD from online retailers

SYMPHONY OF A CITY

The bustle of the market and hush of elite enclaves are clichés of the urban soundscape that a new Brazilian feature carefully avoids

By Frances Morgan

Neighbouring Sounds (*O som ao redor*), reviewed in last month's *Sight & Sound*, is a disturbing study of how people in cities try to insulate themselves from one another, and the tension that builds and simmers from this paranoid impulse. As its title suggests, Kleber Mendonça Filho's film is unusually driven by its characters' sense of hearing: eavesdropping, surveillance, hearsay, noise pollution and unexplained bumps and thunks in the night all play their part. Sound controls the temperature of the story and is the means through which menace gathers in the sunny, middle-class street on the outskirts of Recife, Brazil on which the majority of the action takes place.

It's not unusual for films set in cities – whether real or imagined (the much-referenced hierarchical future Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* springs to mind) – to exaggerate urban sounds as shorthand for class and ethnic divisions. In the most simplistic expressions, marketplaces, favelas and inner-city areas are loud, Babel-like and volatile while rich enclaves and suburbs are cushioned and quiet – both heightened versions of the realities most city dwellers operate within. *Neighbouring Sounds* doesn't deal in such sharp contrasts. Instead, sounds from the unruly outside bleed momentarily into the quiet of the community, from a street vendor's mobile soundsystem to the sudden, resentful scratch of car keys on paintwork. Mendonça allows the street to sound like itself, to play itself.

In that sense, his film is very different from Rodrigo Plá's *La zona* (2007), a thriller set in a gated community in Mexico City that *Neighbouring Sounds* recalls thematically if not stylistically. *La zona*'s soundscape is dramatic, literally stormy, starting with the thunderstorm that shuts down power and allows three young thieves to break into the exclusive Zone. Conflict and tension are spelled out for the most part not with diegetic sound but a sharp orchestral score. Plá's social concerns are similar to Mendonça's in *Neighbouring Sounds*, but *La zona* is a far less ironic and more sombre comment on urban segregation and its consequences, and thus uses these more immediately recognisable sonic and musical conventions to make its wider point. It has a distanced feel compared to, say, *La Haine* (1995) or *City of God* (2002), both iconic urban films that use city sounds with an urgent, rhythmic directness that meshes with the pop music on their soundtracks and transports the viewer straight to street level in both Paris and Rio de Janeiro.

The potential for darkness in a city's fringes is evoked subtly in *Animal Kingdom* (2010), whose brooding soundtrack by Anthony Partos lends the quiet streets of the Melbourne district in which the film is set a layer of gravitas and tragedy that transcends its mundane location. Despite its violent narrative, *Animal Kingdom* is a deliberately quiet film. Its most menacing characters speak



Quiet menace: 'Animal Kingdom'

softly and deliberately, with many scenes taking place during close, warm nights soundtracked by the constant low hum and chirrup of insects.

Neighbouring Sounds allows some music into its soundscape: it opens with Serge Gainsbourg's 'Cadavres en série', the percussion-led opening theme from 1968 thriller *Le Pacha*, which hints that the Brazilian film is more than just a domestic drama. (Elsewhere, the use of Jorge Ben's song 'Charles, Anjo 45', with its lyrics about a local "protector of the weak" returning from prison, underlines the film's deep-seated theme of revenge.) But the drums of the Gainsbourg track are subsumed in layers of traffic sounds, drills and voices that fade up as the film begins. This cacophony quiets to a single sound: a barking guard dog that keeps stay-at-home mother Beatriz awake night after night. Her neighbour João, a young man whose father and grandfather own most of the properties on the street, is seen the

Eavesdropping, surveillance, hearsay, noise pollution and thunks in the night all play their part in 'Neighbouring Sounds'



Thunder in Mexico City: 'La zona'

next day showing clients around a fortress-like flat, extolling its security features and sheltered aspect. On the other side of the apartment block's pristine white wall, a kid kicks a football; even that innocuous sound from the 'outside' induces a faint air of jumpiness, a feeling of suspicion that will come to infect the whole film.

Mendonça's sound design seems naturalistic but it is cleverly constructed, with surreal touches that disorientate the ear such as the sporadic electronic pulse that takes you by surprise in a dreamlike scene in which João's grandfather goes for a late-night swim in the sea. The street's coastal location has been almost hidden up until this point; you realise suddenly, amid the amplified hiss and crash of the waves, how precariously close its people live to a shark-infested ocean. This burst of noise feels like a deliberate rupture in the carefully layered, palimpsest-like soundscape of the city that is made both by the filmmaker and by many of us who live in cities every day, tuning out some sounds and being hyper-aware of others. This isn't the shock tactic of cutting from quiet enclave to teeming slum but something more primal and unnameable, sounding out the fine line between civilisation and chaos. **S**



Beware of the sharks: 'Neighbouring Sounds'

SNAPSHOTS FROM GALICIA



In cold vérité: Maysles brothers Albert, right, and David making 'With Love from Truman' with Capote

The Spanish cathedral town of Tui is host to Play-Doc, a festival on an equally small and exquisite scale

By Nick Bradshaw

Folded into the slopes where Mount Aloia meets the River Minho some 20 kilometres from Galicia's Atlantic edge, Tui is a small cathedral town, its stony old alleys more hushed by day than at night. Wild horses and cows traverse its uplands, sheep graze vacant lots off the main road, and a block beyond I found a fisherman working a tiny tributary of the Minho. Coffee lovers are directed across the main river to Portugal for a better-cafeinated life, but this is the place to be for succulent *polbo á feira* (octopus), hearty *caldo Gallego* (ham soup) and other local delicacies.

It almost feels a breach of confidence to report, but Tui also hosts one of the most exquisite of film festivals, entirely apt to the surroundings. Sara García-Villanueva and Angel Sanchez began Play-Doc in 2005, inviting a mere handful of admired documentaries and their makers; nine years later the budget remains minimal and the programme is, if anything, even more pared away: one theatre hosts a total of 17 screenings over five days, including a five-film international competition and two retrospectives. The confident curation, relaxed timetable and disarming hospitality all instil a mood of extreme receptiveness – to unconventional nonfiction movies and beyond – that seemed to be shared by the local lay viewers. But you don't have to take my word for it: each year the festival invites a previous year's retrospective guest to introduce the new programme, so at www.play-doc.com you can read a relay of eulogies from Ross McElwee, Marcel Łozinski, Jay Rosenblatt, Audrius Stonys, Lech

Kowalski, Pepe Coira and Daniel Dominguez. I trust Albert Maysles is now working up his welcome note to next year's edition.

The festival also serves to hold (or lift) up current Galician cinema to a global standard. Local films have not only grown their way from an 'Atlántico' sidebar into their own showcase, but frequently compete in the *Sección Oficial* competition; the past two years have seen Oliver Laxe's *You Are All Captains* (in 2011) and Xurxo Chirro's *Vikingland* ride out winners. Under the circumstances it almost seemed the jury on which I joined Viennale director Hans Hurch and Portuguese critic and programmer Luís Miguel Oliveira was spoiling the party by not festooning Eloy Enciso Cachafeiro's *Arraianos*, a richly poised and askance portrait of a cloistered Galician border village already praised in these pages in reports from Locarno and Seville. I also caught Lois Patiño's *Montaña en sombra* (*Mountains in Shadow*), a crisply stunning 14-minute study in long shot of ski mountains and skiers which toys with shifts of sound and light – and local regular Marcos Nine's *A brecha* (*The Gap*), a dextrous celluloid blowout which might entertain anyone curious to watch a Stan Brakhage making-of.

Brought into focus by the classic *vérité* collaborations with huckster-performers (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Truman Capote, Bible salesmen and the Beales of *Grey Gardens*) that Maysles brought us, questions of documentary observation and self-presentation spanned the five competition films. Beautifully hewn, Alessandra Celesia McIllduff's *The Bookseller of Belfast* hung out impressionistically with

'Sofia's Last Ambulance'
inspired some hero worship –
you might retitle it *'Only Angels Have Working Ambulances'*



'Sofia's Last Ambulance'



'Three Sisters'

a Northern Irish sage and survivor and three younger aspirants to paint a refreshing sense of Belfast community. Melanie Shatzky and Brian M. Cassidy's *The Patron Saints*, an elegiac portrait of an anonymous American nursing home for the aged, is challenging on more than one level, the patients/inmates/subjects captured in often harsh relief with unclear levels of complicity; what brought it together was a sad, acerbic voiceover by the home's youngest lifer. And similarly desolate – with an undercurrent of human indefatigability – was Wang (West of the Tracks) Bing's *Three Sisters*, another of the director's hardboiled inscriptions of modern China's expendables, here children scratching a living with little adult care atop a Yunnan-region mountain.

But the film we couldn't stop talking about was *Sofia's Last Ambulance*, Ilian Metev's fly-on-the-dashboard record of three ambulance workers trying to do their jobs in the face of innumerable collapses and calamities across the Bulgarian capital. A 180-degree turn from the gaze of *The Patron Saints* (or indeed *The Death of Mr Lazarescu*, whose milieu it echoes), the film is shot partly like Kiarostami's *10*, with an 'automatic' camera on each of the cockpit's trio, and the unstinting focus conjures perhaps a continent's worth of offscreen space intimating, as we wrote in our jury statement, "the concrete problems of a society on the brink of social and economic collapse". The film also inspired some hero worship for these three musketeers – you might retitle it *Only Angels Have Working Ambulances*.

Finally, notes for another time: Nicolás Guillén Landrián, Cuban dissident, electroshock recipient and exile, seemingly a master of both the lyrical and agit-montage modes, though not so much the revolutionary tub-thumper. I couldn't see the festival's second retrospective in situ so am trying my researches via YouTube; I also recommend manuelzayas.wordpress.com and Chris Fujiwara's appraisal at movingimagesource.us. ☺

LIQUID ASSETS

Swiss 'avant-gazetteer' Ursula Biemann's installation about the Sahara sits alongside other recent work about the politics of water

By Sukhdev Sandhu

Circulation lies at the heart of Zurich-born Ursula Biemann's work. As well as moving herself between many fields and practices, operating as a curator, a social theorist, a film essayist, Biemann is both passionately and forensically interested in looking at the world through the lens of flow: the flow – at times obstructed, at other times supported by gunpower, technology and governmental heft – of oil, water, bodies. In *Sahara Chronicle* (2006-2009), an exploration of migration networks across Africa, she visits desert-truck terminals, uranium mines, iron-ore trains, octopus-processing plants. Elsewhere she drifts towards border ports, transit hubs, deportation prisons – transitional spaces and in-between geographies that are as politically pivotal as better-known metropolises. At all times, she is an avant-gazetteer, a poet of capitalist infrastructures, a mapmaker of all-too-overlooked contemporary worlds.

Last year's *Egyptian Chemistry*, which forms one strand of a three-part installation currently on display at Germany's Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, is a sustained investigation into the politics of water in a country that is increasingly short of it. A five-channel video piece, it looks at new schemes to transform desert into arable land, examines the impact of dam construction on the migration patterns of different kinds of fish (fat, lazy tilapia are apparently in the ascendant), follows scientists as they take water samples to be examined in laboratories. It's impossible to watch it without thinking of the Egyptian uprising of 2011, also known as the 'Revolution of the Thirsty' owing to the anger provoked by rising water rates and the World Bank-mandated privatisation of public water. Yet the traditional iconography of resistance is absent: there are no close-ups of placard-wielding protestors, no shots of silted riverbanks, no images of dry-faced housewives looking anguished.

This doesn't mean that Biemann has abandoned the political concerns that have always impelled her work; indeed, as if to underscore the ways in which political realities can rupture everything (even the normally rather hermetic world of artist-film production), one of the most unexpected episodes involves an interview with Cairo-based speculative-realism philosopher Graham Harman being interrupted by a bomb alert and the interviewee squirming in teargas-induced pain. However, it's clear that a filmmaker who once described her work as postcolonialist and who argued that the film essay was a form particularly well suited to the postcolonial project (because, for example, it linked questions of representation to those of victimisation and spectacle), is here searching for an augmented visual language.

Early shots depict the Toshka New Valley project as a compound of Ballardian hyper-realism, science-fiction lunar colony and eerie



Global connections: 'Deep Weather', above, links Bangladesh and Alberta; below, 'Egyptian Chemistry'

example of what the title of Jennifer Baichwal's 2006 documentary about photographer Edward Burtynsky refers to as *Manufactured Landscapes*. Rather than activists or eco-campaigners, it's the voices of electrical engineers, atmospheric physicists and hydraulic researchers that are heard most loudly. Both in the elliptical text that appears on screen and in Biemann's ruminative voiceovers, metaphors of chemistry, science and the cosmos take precedence; the Nile itself is described as "a hybrid system that has always been at once organic, technological and social".

Egyptian Chemistry is a striking contribution



An Egyptian development project seems to combine Ballardian hyper-realism and science-fiction lunar colony

to the emerging body of moving-image work on the topic of hydropoetics (others include Peter Bo Rappmund's *Psychohydrography*, The Otolith Group's *Hydra Decapita*, Allan Sekula and Noel Burch's *The Forgotten Space*), but equally important is how its quest for posthuman aesthetics aligns

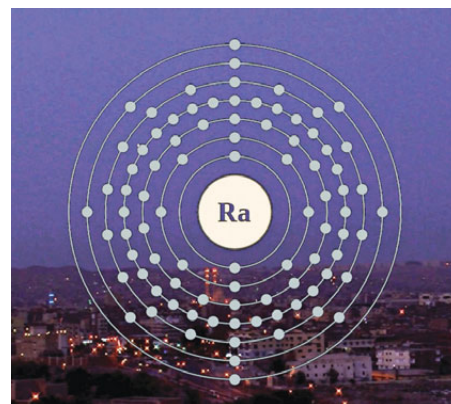




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the filmmaker with a broad range of visual artists who are beginning to investigating the implications of living in an 'anthropocene' era, a new historical phase marked by the impact of human activities on the earth's geology.

At the Kunstverein, Biemann is also showing *Deep Weather*, a new nine-minute film that connects the tar sands around Fort McMurray in Northern Alberta with the coastal areas of Bangladesh: the toxic clouds, acid winds and marine violence of the former will, over the next decades, contribute to the meteorological derangement that may well sink the latter – a link that Biemann, in an unusually dramatic move, narrates in a whisper as if she were a harrowed messenger from Greek tragedy, a bearer of bad tidings she hardly dares voice.

Each element of the installation not only works on its own terms but links with and broadens out the themes of the others. The show cements Biemann's standing as one of the most rigorous and rewardingly speculative documentarians of the present age. It also makes one wonder why she isn't better known. Could it be that the world of the film essay is, more than it would like to think, a men-only club? 

 'Sahara Chronicle', 'Egyptian Chemistry' and 'Deep Water' are at the Neue Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin until 28 April

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



Ansel Adams's iconic photographs of the American landscape have moving counterparts in early cinema

By Bryony Dixon

The spirit of our age is connectivity, made possible – or at least a hell of a lot easier – by the web. The flood of scientific and artistic as well as mundane administrative connections being made using our new toys (sorry, tools) is in full spate. In the art world, we bandy around ugly but serviceable terms like 'media specificity' and 'intermodality'. Rather more pleasingly, web-think offers the opportunity to explore common features of different arts. In recent years we have seen the flourishing of those modish sidebar programmes at the margins of major exhibitions in which fine art, music, film, photography, academic study and museum curatorship find common ground. Recently I was involved in one such programme at the National Maritime Museum – an exhibition of the photographs of Ansel Adams on the theme of the water's edge. Drawing out this aspect of his work reveals the extent to which he used waterfalls (including in his most famous image, 'Clearing Winter Storm'), rivers and streams, geysers and ice, mirror pools, thunderous clouds and breaking waves.

Critics often refer to his astonishing ability to capture the kinetic and reflective qualities of water in the still frame. As Chloe Hodge put it in her review of the exhibition on www.onestoparts.com, "Adams may have moved away from the fluffy glow of the Pictorialists but he is evidently a fine artist, and by no means a documentary photographer – treating scenery as building blocks for a photograph, to be manipulated in the darkroom, water becomes thick treacle, or fine and fast-flowing depending on Adams's mood."

As one of a group of curators, artists and filmmakers asked by the museum to respond to the exhibition for a film weekend event, I had no problem in identifying the nexus of early cinema and Adams's brand of still photography, for they share this affinity. Film, whether still or moving, loves water. Very early film exploited this phenomenon: R.W. Paul's 'Rough Sea at Dover' (1895) and Edison's Niagara Falls series (1896) are just two examples among many that were shown all over the world. The random movements of waves or waterfalls showed off the new medium and required no further mediation from the filmmaker. Unencumbered by narrative, early film was viewed simply for the joy of looking, just as we look at nature in real life. Audiences were already familiar with natural views depicted in paintings, lantern slides, stereoscopic views and postcards, but the mesmerising movement was clearly compelling. Today's new media likewise fully

Film loves water. The random movements of sea waves or waterfalls showed off the new medium's ability simply to look



'Gems of American Scenery'

exploit the simple aesthetic pleasures of water: witness the Fluid app, showreels promoting new flatscreen TVs or the BBC2 'coastal' ident.

One or two early films in particular didn't just share aesthetic or thematic ground with Adams's photographs but presented exactly the same views later made famous by him. A short film called 'Gems of American Scenery' (1919) shows views of the waterfalls of Yosemite, including shots of Nevada Fall taken from the very same viewpoint as Adams's photographs (presumably there are only so many places there where you can stand with your camera). The filmmaker here captures the beauty of the cascade, the powerful smash of water on rock and roiling clouds of mist, again finding no need to comment – a tourist's postcard in motion, with just a caption to identify the place. The film is usually categorised as a non-fiction programme filler of its era, even if its aesthetic recalls high-art imagery of the Victorian sublime and picturesque tendencies, as well as looking forward to Adams's stunning still images of the 1930s and 40s.

Adams famously left people out of his photographs, though we know that certain pictures were taken from a popular car-park viewing-point buzzing with visitors. Many of the early films, by contrast, incorporate the tourists: the BFI National Archive includes an as-yet unidentified film from around 1901 of Old Faithful in Yellowstone, another site famously photographed by Adams, in which tourists are shown viewing the famous geyser before being transported to the next site by horse-drawn carriage. But when the film filters out the people, our experience of viewing the natural scene edges nearer to the experience of viewing artists' films or art photography. The act of connecting similar images from different media in this way tells us a lot about how these different forms are seen, in a spectrum ranging from great art to slickly made commercial product. It also gives us a chance to reinterpret the aesthetic values of early films as things of beauty. 

 'Ansel Adams: Photography from the Mountains to the Sea' is at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich until 28 April

RAMBO AGONISTES

As well as macho wish-fulfilment, US cinema of the 1980s offered plenty of films that questioned ideas of heroism and masculinity



By Brad Stevens

It is often suggested that whereas adventurous adult cinema flourished in 1970s America, the following decade was dominated by

crude right-wing fantasies: *Top Gun*, the Rambo, Indiana Jones, *Lethal Weapon*, *Back to the Future* and *Die Hard* series, and so on. But the 1980s also produced a group of films radically opposed to the tendencies that characterised the period's biggest hits. Most of these films were box-office failures – but they were addressing not mass audiences but those left behind by the wave of conservative reassurance associated with Ronald Reagan's presidency. America's leftist filmmakers were clearly determined to interrogate 1980s Hollywood's two main obsessions: the hero as guarantor of patriarchal/imperialist values; and, intimately related to this, the redemptive power of masculinity. Other distinguished films did appear during this period, but most of the significant titles fall neatly into two categories:

1. Films that explore the problem of the hero: Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980), *The Year of the Dragon* (1985) and *The Sicilian* (1987); Ivan Passer's *Cutter's Way* (1981); Sidney Lumet's *Prince of the City* (1981); Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982); William Friedkin's *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985); Abel Ferrara's *Cat Chaser* (1989); entries in the serial-killer cycle such as Friedkin's *Cruising* (1980), Richard Tuggle's *Tightrope* (1984), Michael Mann's *Manhunter* (1986) and James B. Harris's *Cop* (1987); and several films peripherally belonging to that cycle, including Brian De Palma's *Blow Out* (1981), Oliver Stone's *The Hand* (1981), David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986) and Joe Dante's *The 'Burbs* (1988).

2. Films that critique masculinity. All the above titles could fit just as easily into this category, but masculinity is specifically the focus of Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) and *The King of Comedy* (1983), Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), James Toback's *Love and Money* (1982), De Palma's *Scarface* (1983), Jim McBride's *Breathless* (1983), Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in America* (1983), Paul Schrader's *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985), George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), Robert Altman's *Fool for Love* (1985), Tim Hunter's *River's Edge* (1986), Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1987), Sam Shepard's *Far North* (1988), Monte Hellman's *Iguana* (1988), three films specifically about masculinity's consequences for women – Sidney J. Furie's *The Entity* (1981), Bob Fosse's *Star 80* (1983), Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye* (1986) – and five comedies: Jerry Lewis's *Smorgasbord* (1981), Scorsese's *After Hours* (1985), Elaine May's *Ishtar* (1987), Blake Edwards's *Skin Deep* (1989) and Arthur Penn's *Penn & Teller Get Killed* (1989).



All mixed up: Michael Cimino's 'The Sicilian'

In those films belonging to the first category, the hero – viewed so unproblematically by Spielberg, Stallone and Lucas – is subjected to extensive criticism, his attempts to fight injustice ending disastrously, his decisive actions taken too late or in the name of the wrong cause, his assumption that there is a clear distinction between himself and the ostensible villain undermined, his right to assume the heroic role called into question ("Aren't you the 'good' man?" Batty asks Deckard in *Blade Runner*). *Cutter's Way* focuses on a hero who lacks both context and object, his dilemma imbricated with that crisis of confidence in American values engendered by the Vietnam war. *Cutter's* climactic charge on a white horse links him explicitly with the westerner, American culture's heroic archetype, but does so in a way that undermines both past ideal and present reality. This connection is also made by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, in which Dennis Hopper's obsessional police lieutenant and the cannibal family he is pursuing are associated with western iconography and Vietnam is again a reference point, the family having taken refuge in an Alamo-themed amusement park that one of them suggests converting into 'Nam Land. But the key titles are *Heaven's Gate* and *The Sicilian*, which tentatively suggest that a viable solution to the problem of 'heroic individualism' just might be found in some form of collective activity; needless to say, they were commercial and critical disasters.

In all 40 of these films, masculinity is presented as monstrous, narcissistic, absurd, neurotic, conformist, delusional, immature, excessive and haunted by the fear that it is indistinguishable from its gay/female opposite, frequently taking its inherent negativity to a logical conclusion by annihilating itself and everything around it. The apocalyptic finales of *The Entity*, *Scarface*, *Mishima*, *Day of the Dead*, *Fool for Love*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, *White of the Eye* and *Penn & Teller Get Killed* are especially eloquent on this last point, as are *Cutter's Way* and *Cop*, both of which end abruptly with cuts to black after their protagonists fire guns at the camera/audience. One need only compare Martin Brest's blockbuster *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) with the

These films present masculinity as monstrous, narcissistic, absurd, neurotic, conformist, delusional, immature, excessive

barely released *Smorgasbord* to see what 1980s audiences required where representations of the male body were concerned: in the one film, Eddie Murphy moves effortlessly across spaces he dominates and controls, much as he dominates and controls less masculine men; in the other, Jerry Lewis is unable to successfully negotiate even the most neutral spaces, his humiliation compounded by a series of assured and confident men who regard his failures with contempt (but whom we are never asked to find admirable). Lewis's problem is identical to the one encountered by so many males in these critiques of masculinity: that of the body out of control, a body that can never be strong enough, attractive enough or disciplined enough to compensate for its owner's insecurities. Lack of control is also central to the problematic hero narratives, whose central characters prove incapable of controlling events, other people or even themselves.

What seems most impressive about these films is how coherently they function as a group. And one reason they deserve re-evaluation is that, while good work is still occasionally being done in US cinema, there is no longer a coherent oppositional movement of this kind. Instead we have 'indie' directors whose attitude of postmodern superiority (towards values, viewers, characters and cinematic codes) is, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from mainstream Hollywood's. Consider Bill Murray, whom Andrew Britton once described as radiating an "incorrigibly cynical insouciance" in relation to the 'Reaganite entertainment' in which he participated. But Murray imported this persona into collaborations with auteurs – Jim Jarmusch, Wes Anderson, Sofia Coppola – whose output has far more in common with, say, *Ghost Busters* (1984) – that model of 80s reaction – than it does with the radical texts described here. ☹

SPILLING OFF THE PAGE

Paperhouse, Bernard Rose's eerie film about a girl who enters a dream world populated by her own creations, rewards exploration

By Michael Koresky

When children are playing alone on the green

In comes the playmate that never was seen.

When children are happy and lonely and good

The Friend of the Children comes out of the wood.

Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Unseen Playmate'

In an era saturated by movies of refashioned fairytales, trotted out less for their primal pull than for their marketability, filmmakers could learn a few things from British director Bernard Rose's authentically storybook-like *Paperhouse*, which has the feel of a slightly askew children's film. Made of equal parts bone-rattling intensity and ethereal sweetness, *Paperhouse* is, along with all the best kids' stories, a constant negotiation between dream and nightmare. And, as in the greatest of fairytales, the content of Rose's film is less likely to soothe a child to sleep than instill a whole new host of terrible anxieties. This 1988 curiosity plays as something like a contemporary variation on those beguiling-bedeveling lullabies in Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*, all of which, when read at twilight, seem to make the encroaching shadows grow ever longer. If the passage quoted above gives you a shudder rather than a warm, fuzzy feeling, Rose's film will likely work its magic on you.

Judging by most cinephiles' ignorance of *Paperhouse* and the way film history has largely swept Jack Clayton's masterpiece *The Innocents* and Robert Mulligan's evocative *The Other* under the bassinet, the subgenre we might call 'Kinder-horror' would seem to be one of cinema's least embraced. Too delicate for the gore-hounds, too upsetting for the kiddies, these proceed like picturebooks in which we grow too terrified to turn the page. *Paperhouse* is based on a young-adult novel from the 1950s – *Marianne Dreams* by Catherine Storr – but altered enough from the source material to engage with the kinds of profound emotional and physical ruptures Rose would later feature in his Hollywood dream-slasher *Candyman* (1992). *Paperhouse* is a Freudian work in which the protagonist behaves in ways that adhere only to the rationality of her own unconscious, a wholly interior film that envelops the viewer in the mind of a delirious girl on the verge of pubescence.

A daughter of divorced parents who lives with her mother in a drab suburban apartment complex, 11-year-old Anna (stoic, sullen-faced Charlotte Burke, who might have gone on to a career of playing sociopaths) is *Paperhouse*'s Christopher Robin figure, granted the ability to enter a dream world populated by places and characters of her own making. This ability is first brought on after a collapse at school, when she finds her unconscious self banging at the front door of an ominous stone house that's the uncanny likeness of a rather haphazard image she has doodled in class. Jutting out of an otherwise untouched, windswept field, the lonely abode



To the lighthouse: 'Paperhouse'

Like all the best kids' stories, 'Paperhouse' is a constant negotiation between dream and nightmare

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

"'Paperhouse' offers a modest triumph in the production design by Gemma Jackson... The dream house is a strikingly gaunt structure on a perilously bleak landscape, its interiors opening out with uneasy perspectives and cruel shadows worthy of 'Caligari'. As they slowly accumulate furniture..., the rooms become suitably eerie metaphors of disorder, a bizarre mental parallel to the girl's own cluttered home where, by contrast, the colours are deceptively luxurious. Filmed with some appealing swoops and glides by Mike Southon's camera, the haunted residence grows increasingly forbidding under siege, finally sinking Usher-like into a splendid inferno of flame. An adventurous choice as a first feature for rock-video director Bernard Rose, 'Paperhouse' compensates for hesitations in all other departments by such gratifyingly frequent displays of visual panache."



choice as a first feature for rock-video director Bernard Rose, 'Paperhouse' compensates for hesitations in all other departments by such gratifyingly frequent displays of visual panache."

Philip Strick, 'Monthly Film Bulletin', June 1989

looks like an abandoned remnant of some lost German Expressionist production, slate-grey and strikingly disproportioned. Finding nobody home, Anna realises that she needs to create a friend if she wants one in this imaginary realm, so before falling asleep on the second day she sketches a boy's face in the house's window. "Too sad," she says as she notes melancholy in its expression, but she's unable to turn his frown upside down; her rubber might as well be a piece of plastic as she hopelessly rubs it across the image. As the film creeps forward, Anna begins to add and subtract elements to her paper second-life, all the while forging an unmistakably psychosexual bond with the boy, Marc (Elliott Spiers), whom she discovers has a waking-life counterpart of the same name. Both are sick: the real Marc with a fatal illness, the imaginary Marc because Anna didn't draw any legs for him.

Well, that makes sense, in a sense. These sorts of irrational yet understandable conceits form the strange bedrock of *Paperhouse*. Thus when a brutal, boogeyman evocation of Anna's largely absent father shows up in her dreamworld, blind, raging and wielding a hammer, it perfectly fits within the film's own logic, which is based more on the fear and eroticism of the subconscious than on tenable cause-and-effect motivations. The startling and – if you see this film as a child – unforgettable figure of the daddy-ogre creates a cognitive dissonance: in 'reality', despite one subtle intimation of alcoholism, Anna's father (Ben Cross, a healthy jog away from *Chariots of Fire*) is a perfectly pleasant chap. That she summons him into being as an appalling maniac equally reflects her resentment and her burgeoning sexual fascination with that lumbering beast known as man. After all, like the best children's stories, *Paperhouse* is a tale of growing up – and facing your fears and becoming a sexual being often come as a package deal. 🍷

VIEWPOINT

POST MORTEM

In an era in which mainstream television has finally abandoned cinema, it is increasingly left to the art world to appropriate, if not cinema, then the idea of cinema. The Museum of Loneliness is a philosophical exploration of the realm of post-cinema, a vast image bank waiting to be unedited and stitched together in unexpected ways



Ghost world: by the time 'Content' was made in 2010, the Lumière brothers would not have recognised filmmaking – there was no film and no linear assembly

By Chris Petit

Although I gave up directing films in any accepted sense in 1984 after my fourth feature *Chinese Boxes*, I never gave up the business of filming, however much the business gave up on me; no call from my film agent in 20 years! Any filmmaking is a matter of position and strategy and, although within the broader spectrum I was neither arty nor commercial enough, I thought it possible to make a career of transit – which eventually happened, but not how I had imagined. At the time I couldn't really see what I had to contribute to that beast called British cinema. Not until over a decade later, experimenting in the margins that still existed in television, did it become possible for me to make the sort of scaled-down, tight collaborations I felt comfortable with.

The time when I first stopped making films coincided with the passing of a certain kind of cinema. Its decline was reflected in

the closing of London art houses such as the Academy in Oxford Street in 1986 (demolished three years later, including its marquee and restaurant designed by photographer Angus McBean) and the Paris Pullman, which shut in 1983 after showing *Veronika Voss*. In retrospect the death the year before of that film's director, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, came to mark the end of a European art cinema that had flourished since the end of the war.

It is extraordinary to think now that Channel 4 once ran a major retrospective of Godard or that *Chinese Boxes* got shown on BBC2 after a Liberal party political broadcast. You would find

I started thinking of films that had never got made, a lost pantheon of abandoned screenplays, busted careers and censored moments

it extremely hard to come across either a subtitled film or anything like the latter on television today, despite the proliferation of channels. The BBC's flagship cultural programme, *Imagine*, has profiled just two filmmakers in 21 series, one of them dead. Film4 is a programming shambles. At least it shows older movies where no one else does, currently a job lot from the 1950s and 60s (*Blood Alley*, *The Bedford Incident*, *Gun Fury*), but I couldn't find a single subtitled film showing this week other than the bizarre exception of Dreyer's austere *Ordet*, screened at 1.25am. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, just indicative of television's inability to cope or redefine itself in the digital age. With television's abandonment of cinema, it is increasingly left to the art world to appropriate, if not cinema, then the idea of cinema through a series of mostly mechanical exercises.

In 2010 I made *Content* for More 4, conceived as an informal coda to *Radio On* (1979). When

we were working on the film, it occurred to me that, had the Lumière brothers visited the filming or editing of *Radio On*, they would have seen a process not so dissimilar to their own, but by the time of *Content* they would have recognised very little. Things had passed from the mechanical to the invisible: no film, no more physical linear assembly. Around then I began to think in terms of a post-cinema, based partly on the experience of making the film *Negative Space* (1999) with the critic and painter Manny Farber (at a time when there was much general, premature talk of the death of cinema) and the short film *Surveillance* (1993), whose camera-machines amounted to the first post-human cinema. In a short five or six-year period around the turn of the century it became possible to treat every film project like an experimental laboratory, playing with the feature-film image, splitting it, reframing, refilming, concentrating on background rather than foreground, treating celluloid and digital as though it were a clash of titans. Not that we were reinventing film, but we were turning it into something else: fragments seen like artifacts of a lost civilisation. The experiments reflected Farber's belief that space, not narrative, is the most significant element of film and, as Godard said of Hitchcock in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, how details such as the glass of milk in *Suspicion* stay in the mind long after their narrative point is forgotten; they transcend the original to become film-as-memory.

As Godard showed, cinema creates its own memory bank through the process of being viewed. I had instinctively stumbled on the same point when asked to contribute to a *Sight & Sound* column called 'Obsessions' in 1993. Rather than produce the usual essay I decided a more appropriate approach, given the subject, would be to make a staccato list of flickers or film fragments (again based on something Godard had said about film moments), usually unrelated to the main thrust of the film, which reminded you that you were alive.

In 2010, trying to think of strategic ways of advancing this notion of post-cinema, I came up with the idea of a Museum of Loneliness, which fed into wider notions of non-place and transit. It was conceived as an anti-institution – a parasite working through other bodies – because institutional thinking was showing itself incapable of reading the modern world. Its concept of loneliness referred not to angst but to its founding observation that modern life's primary relationship is no longer human but with the screen, actual and psychological, making everywhere connected and unconnected, lonely and not lonely at the same time.

The image bank exploded with the digital revolution, making previous categories insufficient. Post-cinema exists beyond the usual boundaries of film culture, depending not on aesthetic judgement but on a combination of anthropological and personal memory and forgetting, in effect a continuation of terrain mapped out by Chris Marker. So, for example, a largely forgettable Hollywood film such as *Avalanche Express* becomes a very different experience watched on TV in the middle of the day in 2010 than at a press screening on its release

I thought people might get to hear of the Museum of Loneliness or it might exist in obscurity – both stances equally valid

in 1979. Whether it deserves to be remembered is not the point: the forgettable may be less interesting *per se*, but what makes it forgettable also makes it interesting, and isn't it the fate of all cinema to become forgettable? *Avalanche Express* stands for a particular kind of industrial product and financing and star ranking and is of archival interest in terms of its making, which must have been more than usually wild or stressful because it finished off director Mark Robson and star Robert Shaw, both of whom died of heart attacks during shooting. Director Monte Hellman was brought in to supervise post-production.

Out of such idle morning viewings came the decision to watch daytime TV uninterrupted for a fortnight, simply because it was largely uncharted white space and represented some kind of final frontier. *The Guardian* commissioned a piece and never ran it after I declined either to provide a plausible journalistic reason for watching such television or to let them photograph me doing so. The rejection contributed to the notion of finding less personal ways of dealing with these kinds of projects, outside the usual bylines, especially as we all seemed to have embarked on a journey through cinema and beyond, both obvious – celluloid to memory stick – and less obvious, involving everything from dead TV and vast electro-magnetic slums.

I became mildly obsessed with audio and visual junk: call waiting, elevator announcements, obsolete weather and traffic reports, all the visual crap on YouTube and so many burgeoning and over-documented virtual lives. I wanted to be de-Googled. I grew impatient with standard categories: cinema, television, feature, documentary, film and tape; from what I could see, it was all an image bank waiting to be unedited and stitched together in new and unexpected ways. I started thinking of films that had never got made, a lost pantheon of abandoned screenplays, censored moments and busted careers. I decided a Museum of Loneliness could usefully dedicate itself to sifting such areas, mindful of Bresson's quote that all the great military battles were fought and won in the interstices of staff maps.

From this came the idea of an anti-pantheon for which there is no strict definition other than

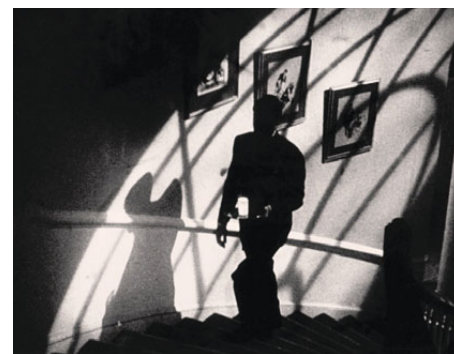
notions of opposite and obscurity, and of terminal cinema, perhaps, and anti-curation. Iain Sinclair found a copy of Budd Boetticher's last film *A Time For Dying* (1969) in a remainder bin in Hastings and passed it on with the information that it was interesting. It was, and a shock too, completely unlike Boetticher's laconic classic westerns. It was garrulous, noisy and jaundiced in its depiction of drunken hanging judges, psychotic aggression and sexual coercion. According to Sinclair, the film was done as a favour to its nominal star Audie Murphy, who was in hock to the Las Vegas mob, and it was made as a money-laundering exercise; an unfortunate decline by any conventional assessment, but watched askance it stands in antithesis to, as well as being a summary of, a career. It is both departure and distillation.

I thought people might get to hear of the Museum of Loneliness or it might exist in obscurity, both stances equally valid. In fact it has been busy, curating an online season for Curzon on Demand in an effort to try to change the usual viewing expectations of film programming. It also seemed appropriate that it should succeed a season by Scott Walker, whose career remains exemplary by the standards of any museum of loneliness. Last year I was among four writers approached by Test Centre, a young publishing outfit dedicated to the written and spoken word, to make an LP. Having always paid attention to sound when watching and making films, I wondered whether it would be possible to produce something more like a soundtrack than *Book at Bedtime* by taking the experience of cinema and trying to make from it a cinema without cinema, so to speak. Without realising, this is perhaps what I have been trying to do all along: my book *Robinson* (1993) was an attempt to carry on making images by producing a prose film disguised as a novel. When Emma Matthews and I were composing the soundtrack for the installation *Flying Down to Rio* (2011) for the Sketch Gallery it occurred to us how little the cinematic memory bank has been sampled for abstract sound collages. For the album *Museum of Loneliness*, the old *Sight & Sound* 'Obsessions' piece was reworked by Mordant Music (which had done *Misinformation* for the BFI) into a *Krapp's Last Tape* of cinema fragments, leaving me to wonder whether the realm of post-cinema even needs pictures. Perhaps not, because, as Godard once said, everything is cinema. ☺

i Chris Petit's Curzon on Demand programme runs from the end of April. The 'Museum of Loneliness' LP is out now



'Avalanche Express'



'Suspicion'

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

TOP HAT

In light of Hannah McGill's fascinating 'Object Lesson' (*S&S*, March), it's interesting to revisit the Coens' *Miller's Crossing*, a film in which the hat plays a prominent symbolic role. In this case, the film appears to belong to the gangster genre, not the western.

Throughout the film, the fedora worn by Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne) is the focus of considerable attention. He is rarely on screen without it, losing hold of it only when beaten, having lost at cards to his lover Verna (Marcia Gay Harden), or when held at gunpoint in the woods by Eddie Dane (J.E. Freeman). At one point Reagan reports a dream in which, while walking in the woods, the "wind came up and blew me hat off" – a glimpse of which appears to be shown to us in the title sequence. To the extent that the cowboy hat represents (in McGill's words) an "uncomplicated, effective masculinity" and an "earthy purity" which belongs to the "wilderness", Reagan's hat represents a more complex, compromised character who belongs to the city, whose masculinity is questioned ("You'd sooner join a ladies' league than gun a guy down," says Dane).

However, as McGill reminds us, the cowboy hat is also a symbol of "American corruption", of "black marketeering, smuggling and theft". In this respect, then, Reagan is a true cowboy. Perhaps this makes *Miller's Crossing* an unorthodox contribution to the western genre, anticipating not only the Coens' *True Grit* but also *The Big Lebowski*, with its own Dude, tumbleweed and, of course, Stetson.

Daniel Whiting, Southampton

ZERO TOLERANCE

Callum Reid supports his defence of *Zero Dark Thirty* (Letters, *S&S*, April) by citing the 'fight fire with fire' speech from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. This misses the point. The question raised in Guy Westwell's review (*S&S*, February) isn't whether torture is justified in fighting a deadly enemy, but whether or not *Zero Dark Thirty* is an honest piece of art. Did the authors of the film make a morally explosive factual error in the telling of a true story? The answer seems to be yes: they presented the use of torture as being instrumental to the detection of Osama bin Laden. Did they acknowledge the error when confronted with it? The answer here is no: they either denied it or sidestepped it by addressing a different question – that the depiction of torture is not an endorsement of it. Westwell is right – the picture smells fishy.

But on the question Mr Reid does raise in respect of *Colonel Blimp*, let's not forget that that film was made at a time when Britain faced a far greater threat than Islamist terrorism.

Paul Cunningham, South Korea

POLL REFLECTIONS

It's nice to see a range of films selected in the context of the *Sight & Sound* poll ('The Greatest Films of All Time', September 2012). Films chosen

LETTER OF THE MONTH RICHIE PICKINGS



In decades of writings on Ozu (above), descriptions of the style of his later films (fixed camera position etc) have been repeated often enough that misleading slips occasionally occur. The "long unbroken take" that Philip Kemp mentions in his review of the DVD of Ozu's gangster films ('Home Cinema', *S&S*, April) is pretty much absent from Ozu.

On a related point, Ozu's Japaneseness, as with all Japanese things, is a fascinating construct. But in attributing the phrase

"the most Japanese of all directors" solely to Donald Richie, the complexity of what's happening is elided. Richie actually wrote, "the man whom his kinsmen consider the most Japanese", and so the meaning of these words lies outside Richie's empirical judgement. Ozu's currency as particularly Japanese stems from dialectics at play within and without the films, and within and without Japan itself.

Tom Vincent, film programme manager, National Media Museum, Bradford

include ones that might be a minute long, or reflect other forms and contexts of viewing or re-viewing. Shorter works by filmmakers like Bruce Baillie, Robert Beavers, Maya Deren and Margaret Tait appear in [voters'] selections, alongside feature-length works. Examples from the directors' poll include Joanna Hogg choosing *A Portrait of Gaby* by Margaret Tait and Apichatpong Weerasethakul selecting *Valentin de las Sierras* by Bruce Baillie (as did I).

Looking at these selected works on the poll database can lead to paths through a changing profile of film. The output of some filmmakers, in terms of the number of films they made, means that they might receive votes spread almost individually over a number of films, and are therefore less visible in the results (Beavers and Brakhage being two examples).

Peter Todd, London

SAYING YES TO 'NO'

It's interesting to read Charles Gant's column on *No* ('The Numbers', *S&S*, April), and the success of the film is to be celebrated. It was the second-highest performing film at Curzon cinemas throughout February. My eyebrows were among those that were indeed raised by the decision to play *No* as part of a Discover Tuesdays slot so close to release. The results were terrific, and if more people got to see the film nationwide, then so much the better. As an exhibitor who gave a strong commitment to the film on release, however, it does beg the question as to the future of specialised films, especially in the regions.

Is a film such as *No* really considered to be worth just a Tuesday-evening showing? Its commercial prospects always struck me as stronger than that. I wonder what the long-term prognosis is for cinema outside the West End and London if titles such as this are only given the potential to play for a single day.

Jason Wood, director of programming, Curzon Cinemas

WORKING TITLES

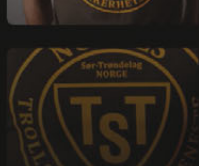
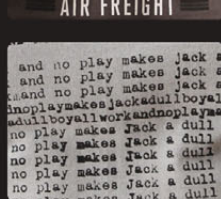
My wife and I are keen cinemagoers and we visit our local art cinema – the Cornerhouse in Manchester – practically every week. Last week we saw *Gangs of Wasseyppur*. Unfortunately the subtitles for some parts of the film were unreadable, ie white on white, which of course spoiled the film for us. Earlier in the week I saw the film *No* and the subtitles were in yellow, and they were easy to read.

Is it possible to ask that films be subtitled in either yellow or a strip of black along the base of the print – where of course the subtitles would be in white?

Kenneth Gold, Bury, Lancashire

Additions and corrections

April p.80 *Neighbouring Sounds*, Cert 15, 131m 26s, 11,829 ft +0 frames;
p.90 *Dragon*, Cert 15, 98m 0s, 8,820 ft +0 frames;
p.92 *Home (Yurt)*, Cert 12A, 76m 30s, 6,885 ft +0 frames;
p.94 *In the House*, Cert 15, 105m 6s, 9,459 ft +0 frames;
p.95 *A Late Quartet*, Cert 15, 105m 39s, 9,508 ft +8 frames;
p.100 *Papadopoulos & Sons*, Cert 15, 108m 44s, 9,786 ft +0 frames;
p.102 *Reincarnated*, Cert 18, 96m 7s, 8,650 ft +8 frames
March p.82 *Compliance*, Cert 15, 90m 24s, 8,136 ft +0 frames;
p.88 *Babeldom*, Cert 15, 84m 17s, 7,585 ft +8 frames



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CANNES FILM FESTIVAL
IN COMPETITION
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CRITICS' PRIZE

IN THE FOG

A FILM BY SERGEI LOZNITSA

★★★★★

"A MYSTERIOUS, COMPELLING
STORY FROM THE NAZI-OCCUPIED
SOVIET UNION IN 1942..."
Peter Bradshaw,
THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★

"THIS VERY RUSSIAN
TRAGEDY IS A JEWEL"
Fionnuala Halligan,
SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

"ONE OF THE FILMS I MOST
WANT TO SEE AGAIN IN 2013."
Jonathan Romney,
SIGHT AND SOUND

★★★★★

Geoff Andrew, TIME OUT

"ONE OF THE VERY BEST WAR MOVIES IN RECENT YEARS"
Jonathan Romney, THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

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Jean Brielat, Rachid Bouchareb
and Muriel Merin present

A film by Bruno Dumont

HORS SATAN

★★★★★
"An intoxicating
experience"
David Jenkins, TIME OUT

"Probably his greatest
film... Dumont is
world-class, right now
at the top of his game."
Kieron Corless, SIGHT & SOUND

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● Includes documentary on
Bruno Dumont and the sound-mix

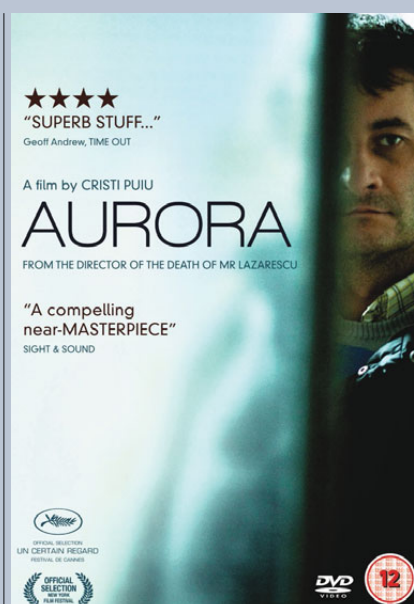
Hors Satan Bruno Dumont

A mysterious drifter played by
the late David Dewaele prays,
poaches and occasionally solves
problems faced by the locals
with violence or some kind of
exorcism. A character beyond
God or Satan – this is Bruno
Dumont's universe, here in
Hors Satan in its most distilled
and unsettling form.

★★★★★
'Dumont's film-making is just
so fluent, unnerving, gripping;
he is entirely unique'
Peter Bradshaw
The Guardian
'Probably his greatest film,
it's a brilliant distillation of his
customary themes...It shows
Dumont is world-class, right
at the top of his game.'
Kieron Corless
Sight & Sound

★★★★★
'Mesmerising, beatific,
disturbing.'

Trevor Johnston, Time Out
'We think it's kinda brilliant.'
David Jenkins
Little White Lies



★★★★★
"SUPERB STUFF..."
Geoff Andrew, TIME OUT

A film by CRISTI PUIU

AURORA

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE DEATH OF MR LAZARESCU

"A compelling
near-MASTERPIECE"
SIGHT & SOUND

OFFICIAL SELECTION
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CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

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● Includes an exclusive
interview with Cristi Puiu

Aurora Cristi Puiu

The follow-up to *The Death of
Mr Lazarescu* is the ultimate
slow-burn film, following the
apparently banal life of a man,
played by Puiu himself,
whose nervousness and
unease is gradually revealed
as the prelude to revenge.

★★★★★
'A technical and emotional
tour-de force. A great addition
to the so-called Romanian
New Wave'

David Jenkins
Little White Lies

'This quotidian portrait of a
man contemplating violence
builds in the mind...Cinema's
own *Crime and Punishment*'

Nick James
Sight & Sound

★★★★★
'One of the most distinctive
artists working in the
cinema anywhere today...
Puiu's special approach
ensures that *Aurora* rings
unusually true. Superb stuff.'
Geoff Andrew,
Time Out

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Reviews

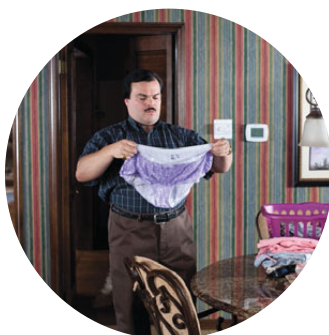


99 **The Look of Love**

Steve Coogan precipitated the film and apparently had his Paul Raymond impression honed by the first meeting, yet somehow the end result lacks the sense of purpose – and the sheer larkiness – that he and Winterbottom brought to their previous feature projects



78 Films of the month



86 Films



110 Home Cinema



122 Books



Out of the shadows: Yaakov Peri, one of six former Shin Bet directors to talk openly on camera in Dror Moreh's *'The Gatekeepers'*

The Gatekeepers

Israel/France/Belgium/Germany/
Canada/The Netherlands/Sweden/
Denmark/Norway/Finland 2012

Director: Dror Moreh

Certificate 15 100m 45s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The target has been identified. A vehicle driving through a built-up area is there in the crosshairs. The order to fire could take out an enemy terrorist, but who else is travelling with them? Innocent individuals who'll also perish? What about passers-by on the street? How many ordinary families could suffer in the collateral damage of a single word?

Think about it and it's a daunting task to play God, but one that's a daily prospect for the chief of the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service. Under the motto 'the unseen shield', its officers work in secrecy, identities unknown to outsiders, the sole exception being the head of the organisation. In a remarkable coup, filmmaker Dror Moreh has persuaded no fewer than six former Shin Bet directors to talk openly on camera about their experience of frontline operations. In time, *The Gatekeepers* delivers a detailed accounting of their battle-hardened ruminations, but before that it opens with aerial surveillance

footage laying out, as described above, the stark consequences of any would-be surgical strike.

Life can be snuffed out in an instant, comes the message from these old warriors – but memories linger for years, decades even. Faces in the mirror, images in the wee small hours. Because of who these men are and what they've done, some viewers will find themselves in staunch ideological opposition to the likes of Avraham Shalom and Carmi Gillon. But before the arguments can even begin, Moreh's film makes the fundamental point that, while they certainly have blood on their hands, rightly or wrongly, these subjects deserve the dignity of their humanity being recognised.

In asserting that members of the Israeli military have feelings too, *The Gatekeepers* aligns itself with Ari Folman's 2008 film *Waltz with Bashir* (a documentary predecessor rather different in form from Moreh's relatively conventional interview-and-archive assemblage) and indeed with fictional counterparts like Samuel Maoz's *Lebanon* (2009). Still, the bulk of Moreh's film goes much further in providing a frank and challenging analysis of the wider context, something those earlier offerings largely opted to sidestep. Much as one might credit the filmmaker's evident powers of persuasion in getting these former intelligence commanders to line up individually before the camera, there's also a sense that

Avraham Shalom and his colleagues are there because they have something to say.

The startling and authoritative result bears that out, for while we might expect a ringing endorsement of the Shin Bet's ongoing mission to maintain the security of the state of Israel, what we get, across the board from interviewees whose service was decades apart, is a grim assessment of the bitter legacy of the Palestinian resentment spurred by their activities – "We wanted more security, we got more terror," asserts one of their number. Moreover, the witnesses also take to task Israel's current political leadership for its absence of vision in moving beyond interminable attritional conflict towards a lasting political solution. "The tragedy of Israel's public security debate," reckons Ami Ayalon, the former naval commander who



Carmi Gillon speaks out



Life can be snuffed out in an instant, comes the message from these old warriors – but memories linger for years, decades even

headed the Shin Bet from 1996 to 2000, “is that we don’t realise we face a frustrating situation in which we win every battle but lose the war.”

With such incendiary opinion on offer, it might have been a temptation for cinematographer-turned-director Moreh to lay out these testimonies end to end, since the words themselves are hardly lacking in impact (not without reason does Yaakov Peri, Shin Bet head from 1988 to 1994, suggest that “after retiring from this job, you become a bit of a leftie”). What makes the film so satisfying, though, is the appreciable craft with which the material is organised and presented, filtered through a post-1967 historical overview that allows the interviewees to reflect on the shifting demands of each new political and diplomatic era, and intercut with archive footage reflecting the transformation of the imagery of conflict across the decades. Thus we go from paternalist old-school newsreels of the Six-Day War, to street-level TV camerawork capturing the defiance

of Palestinian opposition, to the now familiar aerial surveillance images that encourage the viewer’s complicity with the all-powerful aggressor as missile strikes hit their targets.

Positioned within an overall production-design context that cleverly draws on the iconography of espionage (filing cabinets, CCTV monitors, shadowy detention centres), the changing perspectives traced by these various archive formats productively encourage the viewer to look more closely at how the media present the unfolding story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It’s the revelations offered by the interviewees that are the real meat of the matter, however, indicating so many shades of moral uncertainty behind the seemingly implacable public face of Israeli state security policy. Whether it’s the Shin Bet’s reorganisation in the light of another million additional potentially hostile Palestinian citizens within Israel’s expanded borders after the Six-Day War, its being caught unawares by the First Intifada in 1987 or failing to prevent the assassination of PM Yitzhak Rabin by a Zionist extremist in 1995, the film delivers a pacy, agile narrative reflecting the men’s view that operational setbacks and tactical efficacy alike are undermined by ongoing questions of the moral authority of their orders. No coincidence, then, that a similar sort of doubt surfaced in the fictionalised environs of Steven Spielberg’s *Munich* (2005), though the focus there was on the lethal exploits of the Shin Bet’s sister organisation Mossad.

In a way, debate over the use of force is to be expected in this documentary context, though there’s quite a diversity of positions outlined here: Shalom’s shocking admission that he authorised the killing of captured terrorists who’d hijacked a bus; the detailing of the precise circumstances in which enhanced pressure is permitted during suspect interrogations; an expression of defeat when a rare chance to take out an entire cadre of high-value Palestinian targets in one location is missed through political caution over collateral damage. Hawkishness is definitely evident, especially from Messrs Shalom and Gillon, but what’s especially potent and disarming is how the film builds to an unequivocally despairing conclusion. “The future is dark,” reflects Shalom, who expresses a seeming consensus opinion among his compadres on the urgent need to seek a two-state solution, undercut by an equally clear assessment that the toxic combination of hardline security policy and a political leadership with little genuine taste for compromise renders such a solution extremely unlikely anytime soon.

Even more extraordinary, when Ayalon likens Israel’s current security-first relationship with the Palestinian territory to the German army’s repressive occupation of Poland and Holland during WWII, he appears to stop himself using a certain N-word to describe the cruelty which, in his opinion, has permeated his countrymen after decades of conflict. Moments such as these exemplify how this fiercely intelligent film is likely to challenge political assumptions across the spectrum, but it is in the end a partisan view, an act, however brutally honest, of self-analysis from the perspective of those for whom the continuing existence of an Israeli state is never in question. As such, it’s perhaps advisable, if one is seeking a sense of the wider picture, to view it alongside, say, Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi’s recent *5 Broken Cameras*, a vivid and equally partisan portrait of the sufferings of ordinary

Palestinians on the receiving end of Israeli security operations. It’s tempting to wonder too whether the same conundrum of squaring long-term peace with the demands of daily violent action is played out among the command structure on the Palestinian side, but we’ll almost certainly never hear those voices as we do here, since the Shin Bet has silenced so many of them. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Dror Moreh
Estelle Fialon
Philipa Kowarsky
Cinematographer
Avner Shahaf
Editor
Oron Adar
Production Designer
Doron Koren
Original Music
Ab Ovo
Jérôme
Chassagnard
Régis Baillet
Sound Design
Alex Claude

©Dror Moreh Productions, Les Films du Poisson, Le Premier Poisson, Cinephil, Mac Guff, Wild Heart Productions, ARTE France, NDR, IBA, RTBF
Production Companies
Dror Moreh Productions, Les Films du Poisson, Cinephil, Wild Heart Productions present in co-production with ARTE France, IBA Israeli Television - Channel 1, NDR - Norddeutscher Rundfunk, RTBF - Belgian Television and Mac Guff, CBS Radio Canada with the support of National Centre of Cinematography and the Moving Image, MEDIA Programme

of the European Union, Région Île-de-France, Rabinovich Foundation - Cinema Project, Israel Film Council, Procirop - Angoa A film by Dror Moreh A co-production of Dror Moreh Productions, Les Films du Poisson, Cinephil Wild Heart Productions, Mac Guff, ARTE France, Unité Société et Culture, IBA Israeli Television - Channel 1, NDR - Norddeutscher Rundfunk, RTBF - Belgian Television With the participation of RTS - Radio Télévision Suisse Documentary Department, VPRO, CBC Radio-Canada, Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, YLE and the support of National Centre of Cinematography and the Moving Image, New Technologies in Production & COSIP, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Région Île-de-France, together with the C.N.C. This film was

produced with the support of The Rabinovich Foundation for the Arts - Cinema Project With the participation of the Leon Recanati Foundation Supported by the Cultural Administration, Israel Ministry of Culture and Sport, The Israel Film Council, PROCIREP - Société des Producteurs and ANGOA Produced with the endorsement of Copro- Documentary Marketing Foundation R.A. Visions du Réel Sunny Side of the Doc

With
Avraham Shalom
Yaakov Peri
Carmi Gillon
Ami Ayalon
Avi Dichter
Yuval Diskin

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

9,067 ft +8 frames

A documentary in which the six surviving former heads of Israel’s interior security service, the Shin Bet, are interviewed. They explain how their daily duties involved life-or-death decisions which continue to haunt them. Their testimony is intercut with archive footage contextualising their comments. The expansion of Israel’s borders in 1967 after the Six-Day War placed an extra million potentially hostile Palestinians under Israeli authority, creating for the Shin Bet a massive surveillance challenge which it approached via the recruitment of informers and a programme of arrests and interrogation. Resentment in the Palestinian community prompted an ongoing terror campaign, which tested the Shin Bet’s ability to respond while remaining within the law. With its moral authority in question, the Shin Bet also failed to anticipate the First Intifada from 1987 onwards, which seriously escalated the security challenge and led to the diplomatic engagement that produced the Oslo Accords. The creation of the Palestinian Authority provided the Shin Bet with partners in surveillance, but an upsurge in militant rocket attacks on Israel put pressure on PM Yitzhak Rabin from the Israeli right; his assassination in 1995 and the Shin Bet’s arrest of Jewish religious terrorists demonstrated the threat from radicals within the Israeli establishment. The consensus among the interviewees is that the subsequent lack of real political engagement with the Palestinians has been a serious mistake, placing Israel in a hopeless situation – military and technological might has brought victory in every battle but defeat in the war, leaving the state devoid of moral credibility.

In the Fog

Germany/Russia/Latvia/The Netherlands/
Belarus 2012
Director: Sergei Loznitsa

See Feature
on page 32

Reviewed by Hannah McGill
Spoiler alert: this review
reveals a plot twist

"It was kind of my fault,
except not at all," one man
says of another's death in

Sergei Loznitsa's solemn moral epic, adapted by the director from a 1989 novel by Vasil Bykov. Shifting planes of responsibility, on which the slightest decision by one individual can tip others into catastrophe, characterise the philosophical setting of a work that takes as its central premise a terrible irony: that a man spared an unjust death should find survival an infinitely crueler sentence for a crime that he didn't commit in the first place.

Sushenya (Vladimir Svirski) is a railway worker in Nazi-occupied Belarus who fails in his attempts to dissuade hot-headed co-workers from sabotaging a train and is consequently implicated in their plot. The others are hanged, but the investigating Nazi commander (Vlad Ivanov, playing another memorable monster after the abortionist in Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*) offers Sushenya an out if he'll collaborate – and insightfully recognises, on being refused, that he'll punish this particular man much more by keeping him alive than by killing him. Martyrdom becomes a reward denied. ("You want a noble death? Want everyone to write pamphlets about you? That's not going to happen.") Subsequently, though their actions were in truth spurred by nothing more high-minded than a hankering to get their disliked boss into trouble with his Nazi superiors, the deceased plotters are celebrated as heroes, while Sushenya, who tried to intervene in their foolishness and refused to betray anyone else, is tainted by his very survival with the suspicion of collaboration.

Loznitsa, whose previous feature was 2010's *My Joy*, allows all this to emerge in flashback, after Sushenya receives a night-time visit from his erstwhile friend Burov (Vlad Abashin). Slowly we establish why Sushenya offers so little resistance when Burov and his sidekick Voitik (Sergei Kolesov) march him into the woods, obviously to shoot him; he even offers to bring his own shovel. Burov, by promising the death sentence that Sushenya is so widely perceived to have earned, offers relief from his misery. Except that Sushenya is a habitual unwilling escapee from death's clutches, condemned seemingly to stay alive with



The living dead: Sushenya (Vladimir Svirski) is implicated in an act of anti-Nazi sabotage in Belarus

his guilt while those around him claim the simple ending for which he himself yearns. Sushenya's status as a sort of mythic figure, doomed to live on with his multiplying demons, is emphasised by a forest setting shot by Oleg Mutu (*My Joy*; *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*; *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*) in layered sepia tangles suggestive of primeval depth and complexity. Sushenya is in this forest forever. If he takes the plunge and shoots himself – the last possibility with which the film leaves us –

one can only imagine that the revolver will jam.

Death as the happiest ending available. A moral fog of impenetrable density. Such is the bleakness here that it occasionally risks a tension-releasing blurt of laughter on the part of the less-engaged viewer: when Sushenya's wife Anelya runs after her doomed husband pleading with him to brighten his final walk by taking some lard and an onion to snack on; when Sushenya completes the tale that ends in his workmates' hangings only to find that his listener has died during the telling; when, at the end, he sits between the corpses of his two comrades, contemplating suicide as the fog descends around him.

Perhaps there's no reason for Loznitsa to concern himself with less-engaged viewers. His tone is consistent here and true to itself, his story thick with ideas and his characters deeply felt by the actors. But there is certainly no comedy of the *intentional* sort to leaven the film's denser material, and that doesn't just test the audience's endurance – it arguably robs the characters of a certain complexity. What they're missing by losing their freedom and then their lives is perhaps less striking, given the staunchly maintained absence of light in their existence. One grabs greedily – for some warmth, some levity – on



Sushenya (centre) is taken to be shot by Voitik (Sergei Kolesov) and former friend Burov (Vlad Abashin)



assume that we're on one solid plane of reality, and that what we're seeing in flashback is what we should assume went down. The film's structure, whereby each character receives a contextualising flashback, linked to the others by a sequence showing all of them in the present day, offers just the sort of neatness, rhythm and fair distribution of resources not apparent in the characters' haphazard moral universe – a further deep irony in a film replete with them. Sushenya, for one, is aware that storytelling might be the final arbiter of their situation, their sole remaining way out of the swamp they're in – albeit a posthumous one. "Tell everything to your commander about me," he exhorts Voitik, encouraging him to write it down. "You rely on documents?" the man asks him. Sushenya clearly does, on the basis that, "Maybe they'll sort it all out one day." If he can't clear his name in his lifetime, the art of historiography might do it for him. The simple narratives required in wartime – hero or traitor, loyalty or betrayal – don't have the scope to capture what he's undergone; he must look to posterity for adequate representation. Not that it's going to happen, just as the Nazi officer predicted: the people who know his story promptly convey it with them to the grave.

More clouds of grey, indeed, than any Russian play could guarantee. The heavy tragic faces here, the sorrowful contemplation of our collective lot and the absence of levity of any kind all adhere to national stereotype to a degree that some will find wearing. But the intellectual range is vast, and the images and performances stirring beyond the customary standard. In its thorough meditation on man's moral place, and its beautiful depiction of one version of life's trial, lies this film's joy. **S**

The main character's status as a mythic figure, doomed to live on with his multiplying demons, is emphasised by a forest setting suggestive of primeval depth

to a brief scene of Sushenya carving wooden animals with his son, but both participants take even that project rather seriously. There's barely a relationship here without an edge of sourness to it: no lard without onion. Love, in so far as we see it at all, is most clearly signalled between Burov and Sushenya as they hide out in the forest: a slowly dying man and the former friend he'd been resolved to kill. But this sad scenario lets us grasp the poisoned reality of life under occupation, and specifically of Sushenya's recent existence. His domestic set-up, which appears so undeservedly idyllic to Burov at the film's opening – cosy home, family, warm bathwater – has in fact been underscored by suffering all along. By being spared, Sushenya has earned the suspicion of all around him, including his wife.

Respectful of its novelistic origins, *In the Fog* allows its philosophical content – the difference between being alive and being dead, the stability of essential character traits, the meaning of martyrdom and of moral gestures, the challenge to all such notions in time of war – to provide the bulk of its complexity. In other respects, it's told quite straight, without the eerie waywardness of *My Joy*. Loznitsa doesn't always spell out what's happening here but he does give us to

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Heino Deckert

Scriptwriter

Sergei Loznitsa

Based on the novel

by Vasil Bykov

Director of Photography

Oleg Mutu

Editor

Danielius Kokanauskis

Production Designer

Kirill Shuvalov

Sound

Vladimir Golovinski

Costume Designer

Dorota Roqueplo

@ma.ja.de fiction, GP

Cinema Company, Rija

Films, Lemming Film,

Belarusfilm, ZDF/Arte

Production Companies

ma.ja.de fiction, GP

Cinema Company, Rija

Films, Lemming Film,

Belarusfilm, ZDF/

Arte present a film

by Sergei Loznitsa

A co-production of

ma.ja.de fiction, GP

Cinema Company, Rija

Films, Lemming Film,

Belarusfilm, Zdf/Arte

Developed with

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Cast

Vladimir Svirski

Sushenya

Vlad Abashin

Burov

Sergei Kolesov

Voitik

Nikita Peremotovs

Grisha

Julia Peresild

Anelya

Kirill Petrov

Koroban

Dmitrijs Kolosovs

Mishuk

Stepans Bogdanovs

Topchievsky

Dmitry Bykovskiy

Yaroshevich

Vlad Ivanov

Grossmeier

Igor Khripunov

Mirokha

Nadezhda Markina

Burov's mother

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

New Wave Films

Russian theatrical title

V tumanе

German-occupied western Russia, 1942. Residents of a small Belarusian town witness the hanging of three of their number for alleged anti-Nazi sabotage. Some time later, partisans Burov and Voitik show up at the home of Burov's childhood friend Sushenya, to mete out a punishment. They take him into the woods, where he digs his own grave; but before Burov can kill him, he is shot by police himself. Sushenya crawls away, but returns to find Burov. A flashback shows Burov blowing up a truck he built that the Nazis have commandeered. Back in the forest, Voitik goes to find a cart to transport the wounded Burov, while Sushenya tells his story, depicted in flashback. A railroad worker, he failed to dissuade

colleagues from sabotaging a railway line to get their boss into trouble. He was implicated in their plot; they were hanged but Sushenya was spared the death penalty if he collaborated. Though he refused, his survival has convinced townspeople that he named names.

Burov dies while Sushenya is telling his story. Voitik, hiding from passing tanks, recalls his own history: forced to give away his family's location, he saw their home blown up by a Nazi grenade. He returns to Sushenya and the dead Burov. Voitik and Sushenya attempt to make it out of the forest with the corpse, but Voitik is shot and killed. Sushenya, flanked by his dead comrades, cradles a revolver.

Me and You

Italy/Switzerland 2012

Director: Bernardo Bertolucci

Certificate 15 96m 26s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

It's ten years since we last had a film from Bernardo Bertolucci (2003's *The Dreamers*), and nearly 30 since he made one in Italian. Following a fall in which he injured his back, an injury that a course of surgery failed to correct, he's been confined to a wheelchair, and it was widely believed – not least by the director himself – that he would never film again. “A few years ago, I couldn't move any more. I couldn't walk. That, maybe, was the moment when I thought I couldn't do any more movies. I thought, OK, it is finished. I'll do something else... [but] everything changed the moment I accepted this situation.”

This, you might think, could explain why he chose to make a film with a small cast largely confined to one interior location – except that the same could be said of *The Dreamers* and of its predecessor *Besieged* (1998) – or indeed of *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). The fact is that, even before his accident, Bertolucci was slimming down his

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Mario Gianani

Screenplay

Niccolò Ammaniti

Umberto Contarello

Francesca Marciano

Bernardo Bertolucci

Based on the novel

by Niccolò Ammaniti

Cinematography

Fabio Cianchetti

Editor

Jacopo Quadri

Production Designer

Jean Rabasse

Music Composed and Conducted by

Franco Piersanti

Sound Recordists

Remo Ugolinelli

Alessandro Palmerini

Costumes

Metka Kosak

©Fiction - Wildside

Production Companies

A Fiction and Mario

Gianani production

for Wildside

In collaboration

with Medusa Film/

Sky Cinema/

Mediaset Premium

In association with

Intesa Sanpaolo

S.p.A. under the

rules on tax credits

Produced with

the support of

Regione Lazio

Cast

Jacopo Olmo

Antinori

Lorenzo

Tea Falco

Olivia

Sonia Bergamasco

Arianna

Veronica Lazar

grandmother

Pippo Delbono

psychologist

Tommaso Ragno

Ferdinando

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye

Film Company

8,679 ft +0 frames

Italian theatrical title

lo e te

Present-day Rome. Disturbed 14-year-old Lorenzo Cuni tells his mother Arianna that he's going on a week's school skiing trip, but secretly he plans to use the money for the trip to buy supplies and spend a week alone in his apartment building's basement. He pays a visit to his grandmother, bedridden in a nursing home, before settling down in the basement with books and, for company, an ant colony he's bought in a pet shop. His solitude is disrupted by the arrival of his 25-year-old half-sister Olivia. Lorenzo tells her to go, but when she threatens to reveal his whereabouts he's forced to let her share the basement.

Olivia, who's a photographer, tells Lorenzo that she has to go cold turkey, as her lover, whom she plans to live with in the country, insists she come off heroin. Lorenzo finds her groaning with agony in the shower. She screams for sleeping pills and they fight, smashing the ant colony. Lorenzo goes to his grandmother's home and steals some sleeping draughts. Returning, he finds Olivia with an older lover, Ferdinando, who gives her money for one of her photographs and leaves. As their food is now infested with ants, Lorenzo and Olivia go up to the apartment and raid the fridge without waking Arianna, though Olivia steals her cigarettes. That night, while Lorenzo is asleep, Olivia phones a dealer, who brings drugs. The next morning the siblings part, and Lorenzo prepares to resume his regular life.

cinema, restricting its reach and, some would argue, narrowing its conceptual scope. Other directors, of course, have retreated into chamber works as age and infirmity have overtaken them – Dreyer's *Gertrud*, Huston's *The Dead* – but in the process contrived to fine down and concentrate their central concerns. But in the past two decades Bertolucci's work has seemed increasingly prone to sideslip into the slight and even, at its worst, the trivial. The Lean-esque grandeur of *The Last Emperor* (1987) feels very far away, the shrewd vision and trenchant political edge of *The Conformist* and *The Spider's Stratagem* (both 1970) yet more so. The nadir of his work to date is surely *Stealing Beauty* (1996), a jaw-droppingly vapid film in which Bertolucci's camera largely preoccupied itself with ogling Liv Tyler's crotch and bottom.

Me and You is by some way better than that – admittedly not difficult – but it still comes across as a stylish exercise in willed claustrophobia (or claustrophilia, as the director puts it) without a great deal to say. The story – in which a teenage boy and his older half-sister spend a week together in a cramped basement – is adapted from a novel by Niccolò Ammaniti, who also co-scripted along with Bertolucci and two others. One of Ammaniti's earlier novels provided the basis for Gabriele Salvatores's *I'm Not Scared* (2003), about claustrophobia of a different sort: a small boy finds another boy being held captive in a hole in the ground and comes to realise that his father is involved in the child's kidnapping. Salvatores's film is let down in its final few minutes by a lurch into sentimental religious symbolism, but luckily the religiosity that blighted *Little Buddha* (1993) plays no part in *Me and You* – although Bertolucci has admitted to making the ending of his film harder than it is in the novel.

Bertolucci often likes to spice up his films with a hint of incest (if usually stopping short of the actual thing) and so he does here. After *The Dreamers*, in which Theo (Louis Garrel) and his sister Isabelle (Eva Green) like to take baths together, we might expect something of a replay between 14-year-old Lorenzo (Jacopo Olmo Antinori) and his 25-year-old half-sister Olivia (Tea Falco). But though we see a growing closeness and affection between the siblings (literally so – they move their beds closer together), there's little suggestion that they fancy each other. The frisson of an illicit relationship comes earlier, when Lorenzo embarrasses his youthful-looking blonde mother Arianna (Sonia Bergamasco) in a restaurant by wondering if people might take them for a couple, before going on to ask if she'd have sex with him if they were the sole survivors of a holocaust and needed to repopulate the planet. “If it was a boy, what would you call him?” he teases her. This faintly echoes Bertolucci's *La luna* (1979), where Jill Clayburgh's character masturbates her son (Matthew Barry). According to Clayburgh, Bertolucci shied away from featuring full-on mother-son incest, unlike Louis Malle (*Murmur of the Heart*, 1971) or David O. Russell (*Spanking the Monkey*, 1994).

If intimations of sex go largely unfulfilled in *Me and You*, the same goes for any anticipations of violence. The first shot of the film is of a shock of black curly hair on a head stubbornly lowered; when it's raised to face the interlocutor, the resemblance to the young Malcolm McDowell is startling – all the more so since the shot so blatantly replicates the opening of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). It transpires that Lorenzo is in a psychiatrist's office (the



Him and her: Jacopo Olmo Antinori with Tea Falco

shrink, interestingly, is in a wheelchair – a Bertolucci surrogate?) and his air of suppressed anger and mulish refusal to respond suggest that an outbreak of ‘ultraviolence’, if not ‘the old in-out’, may be in the offing.

But Lorenzo, it turns out, is no Alex clone. True, he plots to deceive his mother by pretending to go on a school skiing trip while holing up in his apartment block's basement for a week – but that apart, he's remarkably well behaved and even studious for a maladjusted teenager. He takes a pile of books with him into his basement hideaway rather than a PlayStation, and keeps his lair scrupulously tidy, putting out all his refuse in black plastic bags. He dutifully visits his aged, bedridden grandmother, with whom he's gentle and affectionate; and he's evidently well up on natural history, knowing far more about chameleons than the offhand youth staffing the pet store where Lorenzo buys himself a glass-sided ants' nest for company.

The film's only outbreak of violence – apart from Lorenzo screaming at his mother in the car – is a clumsy scuffle between the siblings when, going cold turkey from heroin, Olivia demands sleeping pills. At one point Lorenzo claims that he and his father killed the old countess whose clothes and furniture conveniently furnish the basement with some comfort,



The film comes across as a stylish exercise in willed claustrophobia (or 'claustrophilia', as the director puts it)

but this is clearly fantasy and Olivia brushes it aside. Only once does a real sense of danger ruffle the film's tranquil surface, when the pair creep up to Lorenzo's flat at night to raid the fridge (the ants' nest having been broken in the scuffle, ants now infest all their provisions). They find Arianna fast asleep on a sofa with the TV still on, and Olivia hovers malevolently

over her stepmother, her face a livid blue from the light of the screen. Lorenzo manages to persuade her away without harming Arianna.

Bertolucci draws performances of impressive directness and naturalism from his two principals – especially from 14-year-old Antinori (in his screen debut), every inch the awkward, unhappy teenager with his acne-pitted face and fluffy incipient moustache. He makes masterly use of his restricted space too, framing and reframing the basement with his roaming camera so that it never becomes monotonous. But as with *The Dreamers*, set in 1968 Paris but largely ignoring the political turmoil on the streets outside in favour of the narcissistic trio in their apartment, *Me and You* rarely ventures into any wider arena. At the end of the film the siblings offer each other advice. Lorenzo tells Olivia, "Never take drugs again," while she tells her brother, "Stop hiding." We've seen Olivia take a delivery from her pusher the night before, so we know she's unlikely to comply. As for Lorenzo, Bertolucci (channeling *The 400 Blows*) ends on an enigmatic freeze-frame of his face, leaving the question open. You can't help wondering whether Bertolucci, once one of Europe's most politically acute and challenging filmmakers, may not also have settled for hiding in the basement. ☹



Lorenzo and Olivia hide out in their basement lair

The Place Beyond the Pines

USA 2012

Director: Derek Cianfrance

Certificate 15 140m 34s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

There's a scene in Derek Cianfrance's latest film in which carnival stuntman Luke Glanton (Ryan Gosling) tears through a forest on his motorcycle. The camera ducks and dives to stay level with him, till he catches sight of another rider keeping pace on a parallel path, and he's shrink-wrapped in a tight frame. The leaves rush by, a green crosshatch, as the camera switches between riders, and Luke – square in the middle of the screen – looks, for all his speed, to be motionless. Little does he know that he has locked eyes with the man who will set him on the path to self-destruction. There's urgency and a ponderous fatality to this moment – quick and slow – which encapsulates the film's (almost) conclusive perception of its characters: that though life may move around them, they are unalterably themselves, and getting nowhere.

The third film from director Cianfrance (with a soft C) is inclined to this sort of symbolism in a way that his last, *Blue Valentine* (2010), was not. A naturalistic capsule-study of one love's genesis and degeneration – also starring Gosling, alongside Michelle Williams – *Blue Valentine*

engendered a lot of pre-release fuss when it got around that the two lead actors had improvised the lion's share of dialogue. When it finally hit screens, the procurement of the film's central performances mattered not at all, because its director had created an absorbing chiaroscuro universe of butterfly emotion turned prosaic, dexterously collaging the now and then.

With *The Place Beyond the Pines*, Cianfrance moves into vastly different territory. An expansive, many-textured epic in two parts, shot on location in Schenectady, New York, the film explores the bloodline tie between two adolescent boys (the second part) and their absent fathers (the first). Using an ensemble cast, live locations and more than ten times the budget of previous productions, it's an ambitious work of a far larger scope than the director is used to collaring. It's not to be expected that he would succeed outright in making so giant a leap from lo-fi indie to blockbuster – it's been the downfall of numerous others – and he hasn't

It's an eloquent debut-of-scale, pensive and pacy by turns, and speaks of more filmmaking experience than Cianfrance has had time to accumulate

made it easy on himself. The film spans nearly two decades, with a jump to '15 years later' at the halfway mark, and it runs to two and a half hours. In fact, it's an eloquent, engaging debut-of-scale, pensive and pacy by turns, and one which speaks of more filmmaking experience than Cianfrance has had time to accumulate.

Pines opens on a tattooed Luke as he makes his way over to a circus tent to perform in a three-man motorcycle stunt in the globe of death. When he finishes, he sees Romina (Eva Mendes), an old flame of a year earlier. It isn't long before he learns, unceremoniously, that she's had his baby, Jason, and has settled down with new man Kofi, who is the model of constancy and togetherness. Luke and Ro spend a day together, and he tries to persuade her, with small-town charisma, to invite him to take back his family. But Romina is realistic: he's far too restive to be depended upon, and Mendes puts this across in poignant shorthand, averting her face to hide a hurt no fault of her own, as they lie together naked in his trailer. When Luke meets car repairman Robin – the mystery rider in the woods – he turns to serial bank robbery to prove his solvency, but it spirals swiftly out of his control. Ignoring a warning from Robin, he blunders a job and is killed in a mishap shooting by trigger-happy trainee cop Avery Cross, played by Bradley Cooper.

It's a bold move to get rid of Gosling so early in the film, because the actor brings a red-raw vitality



Counting the cost: Ryan Gosling as stunt-rider Luke in Derek Cianfrance's 'The Place Beyond the Pines'

to his performance. There follows something of a temporary slump on his replacement with the far less soluble Avery. But as the only character to substantially occupy both halves – his rookie indiscretion emerging as the linchpin of the story – Avery grows more interesting as the film goes on. This is especially the case in the second chapter, which sees the sons of Avery and Luke – both now 16 – edging closer to uncovering the painful truth of their connection. The older Avery, having blackmailed his way into the role of district attorney and in the midst of a political campaign, is living with the consequences of neglecting his son out of an indomitable lust for success. Somehow, still, one feels for him, as a man substituting ambition for intuitive talent: life so far has shown that he gets results by hard work, dedication and an ace in the pack, not by any natural aptitude. For Avery, there's a disconnect between his professional and private self. Coming to after surgery following his shootout with Luke, the first words out of his mouth are: "What happened to the other guy? Did he have a family?" Avery is instinctively compassionate, but when something's right in front of him – when he's face to face with Luke, when it's his *own* son – his good conscience isn't operative.

Where *Blue Valentine* was stylistically coherent, *Pines* spins genres. Texas-born British cinematographer Sean Bobbitt – who has worked with artist-turned-filmmaker Steve McQueen



Eva Mendes plays Romina, Luke's former lover and mother of his child

on all three of his features to date (*Hunger, Shame* and the upcoming *12 Years a Slave*) – shot the film on 35mm, and his experimenting with nostalgic composition yields beautiful results. The same goes for the editing: a blue-filter fadeout from husband and wife abed to an overhanging shot of their white-collar home recalls 1980s Michael Mann, and there are traces of Terrence Malick in the disembodied conversation overlaying tableaux of like-souls Robin and Luke, including a long-shot of a half-tight Robin chasing geese in the driving rain.

In fact, the film shares with *Days of Heaven* (1978) a certain narrative tone, in so much as it feels both immediate and remembered, as though its players were predestined to act and end as they do. Cianfrance has said that he wanted it to play out "like a storybook", and achieves this with leaps and bounds in time, quick cutaways and a liquid topography. It's a *mélange* that works, and it's mirrored in the director's choice of music, mixing diegetic anthems such as Springsteen's 'Dancing in the Dark' with ex-cathedra chorales and an original piano theme by Mike Patton, so

gorgeously evocative that it sends one combing for deeper-hidden meaning with every use.

With any trans-generational narrative without a dominant central character, there's a risk of obscuring the heart of the film. Cianfrance cites the second act as the "real film" – the story in earnest – but leaves no breadcrumb trail to help his audience to the same understanding. The film is perhaps overlong, and loses momentum three-quarters of the way in – not helped by the tonal shift in the second act, an almost two-hander of such extraordinary high tension that it borders on the homoerotic. However, newcomers Dane DeHaan and Emory Cohen so impress with the pathos and maturity of their performances that the film holds attention to the end.

'The sins of the father visited upon the sons' is a difficult theme to pull off, but *Pines* fares better than Elia Kazan did with his 1955 adaptation of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, which similarly traced parental heredity in two teenagers. Grand, plangent and innervating, Cianfrance's latest is more than adequate proof that he's as cut out for the big as for the small of cinema. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sidney Kimmel
Jamie Patricof
Lynette Howell
Alex Orlovsky
Screenplay
Derek Cianfrance
Ben Coccio
Darius Marder
Story
Derek Cianfrance
Ben Coccio
Director of Photography
Sean Bobbitt
Edited by
Jim Helton
Ron Patane
Production Designer
Inbal Weinberg
Music
Mike Patton
Sound Mixer
Damian Elias Canelos
Costume Designer
Erin Benach

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Distribution, LLC
Production Companies
Focus Features and
Sidney Kimmel
Entertainment

present an Electric
City Entertainment
production in
association with
Verisimilitude
A film by Derek
Cianfrance
Executive Producers
Jim Tauber
Matt Berenson
Bruce Toll

Cast
Ryan Gosling
Luke
Bradley Cooper
Avery
Eva Mendes
Romina
Ray Liotta
Deluca
Ben Mendelsohn
Robin
Rose Byrne
Jennifer
Mahershala Ali
Kofi
Bruce Greenwood
Bill Killcullen
Harris Yulin
Al Cross
Dane DeHaan
Jason

Emory Cohen
AJ
Olga Merediz
Malena
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Studiocanal Limited
12,651 ft +0 frames

Schenectady, New York State, the present. Recently back in town for the first time in a year, carnival stunt-rider Luke Glanton runs into his former lover Romina. Dropping by her house, he discovers that he's the father of her baby, Jason. Romina hadn't told Luke about her pregnancy because he left town suddenly, putting an end to their fling. Luke tries to talk her into letting him raise the baby, but she's in a new relationship and doesn't believe that he can provide for a family. When Luke is befriended by car repairman Robin, he starts robbing banks for an income, but is eventually caught out and killed by Avery Cross, a policeman giving chase. The shooting makes headlines and Avery is awarded a medal for bravery. He attends counselling to work through his guilt over killing a man with a baby: he has a boy, AJ, the same age. Avery goes on to expose corruption in his department, buying him the role of district attorney.

Fifteen years later. Troubled teen AJ moves in with his father, now separated from AJ's mother and active in local politics. At his new college, AJ finds a friend in well-meaning loner Jason, but the two get into trouble when arrested for drug possession. Looking for information about his biological father, Jason discovers Luke's identity and the nature of his death. Jason goes after AJ and Avery, meaning to exact revenge, but then thinks better of it. He buys a motorcycle like his father's and rides away.

The ABCs of Death

USA 2012
Certificate 18 124m 4s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"I'm sorry, it was going to be better – but we didn't have time." The unnamed speaker has been poisoning her husband for months, intending to murder him slowly and inconspicuously – but now she has changed tack, messily stabbing him and then flinging boiling oil over his face. The reason for this sudden haste, hinted at by the escalating sounds of mayhem coming from outside the couple's apartment window, is finally revealed in the title that follows: 'A for Apocalypse'. If the world is about to come apart and everyone is going to die, then this most coldly vindictive of wives is damned if she won't kill her husband first. Nacho (*Timecrimes*) Vigalondo's piece makes a perfect introduction to *The ABCs of Death*, an anthology of 26 short tales of death by genre directors from 15 different countries. Not only does his chapter ensure that the collection aptly begins at The End, it also rather neatly sets forth the limitations of the omnibus format. No doubt Vigalondo (and many of the other contributors) might, like the wife, have preferred being able to craft a better, less inelegant death, but there is only so much that one can do when there is so little time.

Like David Lynch's more economically unnerving short *The Alphabet* (1968), *The ABCs of Death* was inspired by a dream, but its nightmarish abecedar, though certainly drawing on horror, depends far more on shock tactics and grotesque abjection than on genuine frights – the latter requiring a slow building of tension impossible in so short a format. Shock too is most effective when deployed sparingly, so the effect of the individual chapters here is deadened by their relentless succession, despite the range of styles, sensibilities and media (POV camerawork in Andrew Traucki's G and Ben Wheatley's U,

animation in Anders Morgenthaler's K and Jon Schnepf's W, claymation in Lee Hardcastle's hilarious T). By the time we reach the scattergun offensive against good taste that is Nishimura (*Tokyo Gore Police*) Yoshihiro's Z, even those unfamiliar with its director's trademark CG-inflected bubblegum splattercore will have had their reactions muted. Call it shock and bore.

This is, in part, the subject of Timo (*Macabre*) Tjahjanto's startling L, whose protagonist, bound to a chair and forced to masturbate competitively to a series of increasingly repellent scenarios, holds a mirror not just to the paradoxical pleasures of horror viewing but the specific experience of *The ABCs of Death*. Other highlights include Xavier (*The Divide*) Gens's confronting carve-up of body-image obsession in X, Simon (*Red White & Blue*) Rumley's deftly edited descent into underclass exploitation in P (the segment most grounded in the real world, and the only one without human death), and Srdjan (*A Serbian Film*) Spasojevic's use of Cronenbergian idioms to allegorise the death of film in the bewildering R. The punch of some sections comes in the paratext: the best joke in Thomas (*Norwegian Ninja*) Malling's H is the unguessable title revealed at the end, while the true impact of I, Jorge (*We Are What We Are*) Grau's disturbing riff on torture porn, is delivered in an explanatory text that doesn't appear until the feature's closing credits.

As with most anthologies, the quality varies greatly, and the talents of directors such as Ti West (*The Innkeepers*), Wheatley (*Kill List*), Adam Wingard (*A Horrible Way to Die*) and Marcel Sarmiento (*Deadgirl*) are shown off to greater effect in their feature-length works. There are some memorable moments here but reports of a follow-up alphabetic run will hardly spell enthusiasm for filmmakers. Ⓢ

All Stars

United Kingdom/Germany 2013
Director: Ben Gregor

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Let's put on a show!" is a trope that can be traced from *Babes in Arms* (1939) through *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *Honey* (2003) to *The Muppets* (2011). So when the schoolchildren in Ben Gregor's *All Stars* attempt to rescue their local youth centre with a talent contest, they are dancing to a familiar tune, while their chosen competitive medium also taps into a recent rash of dance-based films, from *Step Up* (2006) and sequels through to the UK's own phenomenally successful *StreetDance 3D* (2010) and *StreetDance 2* (2012), of which *All Stars* is a spinoff (its working title was *StreetDance Juniors*).

If first-time feature director Gregor comes from the small screen, so too do the idioms of his film's dance-off format, currently to be seen in television programmes such as *Got to Dance* (whose first winner, Akai Osei, takes a lead role here as contest organiser Jaden) and *Strictly Come Dancing* (whose runner-up from last year, Kimberley Walsh, plays another character's mother). There is even, in all the school-set shenanigans, quite a bit of TV's *Grange Hill* – and when an older dance rival describes Jaden's schoolmate Ethan (Theo Stevenson of *Horrid Henry*) and his friends as "Glee-Beebies" (a punning blend of TV series *Glee* and the BBC's preschool network CBeebies), screenwriter Paul Gerstenberger, who also has an extensive background in television, is openly acknowledging this film's cultural influences.

Yet if viewers are familiar with its routines, *All Stars* still finds ways to keep the individual steps diverting, showcasing a broad range of dancing talent while mixing children's entertainment with a degree of social realism. With an early sequence that expressly contrasts Ethan's 'Dream' – in which he is met at school by a sunny, choreographed fanfare from the pupils – and his 'Reality' – in which his late arrival is marked by drizzle and noticed only by an angry teacher – *All Stars* establishes dance as an escape from grimmer realities. Accordingly, when Jaden is faced with the pressures of an entrance exam for which he hasn't studied, he imagines himself dancing off against paper samurai in an origami world; meanwhile Ethan's neighbour Amy (Fleur Houdijk), faced with a depressed and withdrawn father at home,



Tiny dancers: Fleur Houdijk, Theo Stevenson

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ant Timpson
Tim League
Based on a nightmare by
Ant Timpson
Sound Mix
Tom Miskin

©Magnolia Pictures
LLC & ABCs of
Death Film Limited
Production Companies
Magnet Releasing
presents a Drafthouse
Films & Timpson
Films production
Executive Producer
Tom Quinn

Apocalypse
Written/Directed by
Nacho Vigalondo
Cast
Eva Llorach
Miguel Insua

Bigfoot
Written/Directed by
Adrián García
Bogliano
Cast

Alejandra Urdiain
Harold Torres
Greta Martínez

Cycle
Written/Directed by
Ernesto Díaz Espinoza
Cast

Matias Oviedo
Juanita Ringeling
Dogfight
Written/Directed by
Marcel Sarmiento
Cast

Steve Berens
Riley
Chris Hampton

Exterminate
Directed by
Angela Bettis
Based on the short
story *The Spider*
and *the Man* by
Brent Hanley
Cast

Fart "Young Ladies and Poison Gas"
Written/Directed by
Iguchi Noboru
Cast
Nakamura Arisa
Murata Yui

Gravity
Written/Directed by
Andrew Traucki

Hydro-electric
Diffusion
Written/Directed by
Thomas Cappelen
Malling
Cast

Ms Martine Arnes
Mr Johannes
Eilertsen

Ingrown
Written/Directed by
Jorge Michel Grau
Cast
Adriana Paz
Octavio Michel

Jidai-geki
Written/Directed by
Yamaguchi Yudai
Cast
Sasaki Daisuke
Nishina Takashi

Klutz
Written/Directed by
Anders Morgenthaler

Libido
Written/Directed by
Timo Tjahjanto
Cast
Paul Foster
Kelly Tandiono

Miscarriage
Written/Directed by
Ti West
Cast
Tipper Newton

Nuptials
Directed by
Banjong
Pisanthanakun

Screenplay
Banjong
Pisanthanakun
Nontra Khumwong
Cast

Wiwatt Kongrasi
Orn-Arinn

Peerachakajornpatt

Orgasm
Written/Directed by
Hélène Cattet
Bruno Forzani
Cast

Manon Beuchot
Xavier Magot

Pressure
Written/Directed by
Simon Rumley
Cast

Yvanna Hilton
Chaira Sedney
Shelissa Sedney
Chennevieve
Huisden

Quack
Written/Directed by
Adam Wingard
Cast
Adam Wingard
Simon Barrett
Liz Harvey

Removed
Directed by
Srdjan Spasojevic
Written by
Dimitrije Vojnov
Srdjan Spasojevic
Cast

Slobodan Bestic
Ljubimir Todorovic

WTF

An anthology of 26 short films, each named for a different letter of the alphabet, each directed by a different genre filmmaker, and each focused on death.

Marina Savic

Speed
Writer/Directed by
Jake West
Cast
Darenzia
Lucy Clements
Peter Pedrero

Toilet
Written/Directed by
Lee Hardcastle
Voice Cast
Kim Richardson
Lee Hardcastle

Unearthed
Directed by
Ben Wheatley
Written by
Ben Wheatley
Andy Starke
Cast

Neil Maskell
Michael Smiley
Robin Hill

Vagitus
Written/Directed by
Kaare Andrews
Cast
Kyra Zagorsky
Fraser Corbett
Michael Rogers

WTF

Written/Directed by
Jon Schnepf
Cast
Dink O'Neal
Jon Schnepf
Tommy Blacha

XXL
Written/Directed by
Xavier Gens
Cast
Sissi Duparc
Yasmine Meddour
Patrick Ligardes

Youngbuck
Written/Directed by
Jason Eisener
Cast
Tim Dunn
Rylan Logan

Zetsumetsu
Written/Directed by
Nishimura Yoshihiro
Cast
JeSica
Yashiki Hiroko
Murasugi
Seminosuke

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Bounty Films

11,166 ft +0 frames

fantasises a charming black-and-white tap-dancing duet with her re-energised dad. These bursts of fantasy show off the film's 3D to best effect, and admit an inventive variety of salutory styles to the film – much as Jaden's crew, though nominally a streetdance outfit, additionally incorporates Amy's martial-arts moves and the ballroom poise of 'posh' public-school siblings Tim (Dominic Herman-Day) and Rebecca (Amelia Clarkson). Yet the fantasy sequences also slyly suggest an ongoing disjunction between dreams and reality, so that the ultimate on-stage triumph of these schoolchildren, saving their youth club, their families and their community, is framed as precisely what it is: genre-bound wish-fulfilment in a sociopolitical environment of failing schools, broken homes, council closures and bulldozing recession.

So despite its hackneyed storyline, broader-than-broad characterisation and utterly predictable ending (all of which are of course likely to appeal to its target pre-teen viewership), *All Stars* takes contemporary British realities as its partner, and occasionally even lets them lead its merry dance. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Allan Niblo James Richardson Jim Spencer Written by Paul Gerstenberger Director of Photography Ben Wheeler Editor Jono Griffith Production Designer Matthew Button Music Composed by Simon Woodgate Production Sound Mixer Stevie Haywood Costume Designer Andrew Cox	with SquareOne Entertainment a Ben Gregor film A Vertigo Films production Executive Producers Al Munteanu Rupert Preston Nigel Williams Nick Love Cast Ashley Jensen Gina Ashley Walters Mark Kevin Bishop Andy Hugh Dennis Mr Hart Mark Heap Simon Tarrington Javine Hylton Kelly John Barrowman Matthew	Kimberley Walsh Trish Theo Stevenson Ethan Akai Jaden Fleur Houdijk Amy Dominic Herman-Day Tim Amelia Clarkson Rebecca Gamal Toseafa Brian Hanae Atkins Lucy Kieran Lai Kurt Dolby Digital In Colour Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Vertigo Films
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South London, present day. Schoolboy Jaden has been forbidden to dance by his parents, who want him to concentrate on passing the entrance exam for a private school. However, when local youth club The Garage is threatened with closure, Jaden secretly organises a talent contest to save it. He turns for help to scamming schoolmate Ethan, who needs a dance crew of his own after his pursuit of Lucy has ended in a reckless challenge to her older boyfriend Kurt's semi-professional streetdance outfit. The two boys recruit Ethan's karate-obsessed neighbour Amy, overweight remix artist Brian and posh ballroom-dancing siblings Rebecca and Tim. After some teething troubles, Jaden devises a way to incorporate the crew members' different strengths into their routine.

Efforts to persuade the local council to keep The Garage open are ruined when Kurt provokes Ethan into a fight outside the meeting. Both Ethan and Jaden quit the crew but return in time for the talent contest, which they win. They also win over Jaden's parents and a key council member. Ethan and Amy become a couple, and the eviction notice for The Garage is torn up.

BAFTA Shorts

United Kingdom/Ireland 2011 - 2012
Directors: various

Reviewed by Dylan Cave

Short films virtually vanished from cinema programmes decades ago. Today only a handful of features play with a supporting short, so relatively few short films actually reach general cinema audiences. This selection of live-action and animated shorts nominated for the 2013 Bafta awards is a bravura attempt to rectify the imbalance. Well packaged and thoughtfully sequenced, the films assembled here provide a rare chance to see the best of British short filmmaking on the big screen.

Given the programming challenge of selecting from such a tight number of titles (all but one of the eight nominated shorts are included), it's remarkable that the chosen films fit so well together. These are nominees for national filmmaking awards so one expects them to be well crafted, and indeed each boasts a nuanced narrative and visual flair. But this 'best of British' package also reveals a pleasingly

diverse range of filmmaking voices, telling unique stories from across the UK and beyond.

Kris Kelly's British-Irish co-production *Here to Fall* is a sojourn through a disintegrating urban landscape. Kelly's film animates the collapsing world of Amy, a young woman shattered by a call from her estranged father. The director's beautifully rendered cityscape is fragmented by the ominous dark shadows of the absentee parent as it morphs between comforting and consuming the vulnerable Amy, providing a solid visualisation of the hole in her life.

Fyzaal Boulifa's *The Curse* also features a pursued young woman. In Morocco, teenager Fatine is harassed by kids from her village who know that she's sleeping with an older man and blackmail her into buying cakes. Boulifa charts Fatine's tragic descent as she offers sexual favours in exchange for money to buy the treats. Set firmly in the reality of authentic Moroccan locations, Boulifa's film nevertheless 

Credits and Synopsis

Here to Fall Ireland/United Kingdom 2012 Directed by Kris Kelly Produced by Evelyn McGrath Written by Evelyn McGrath Kris Kelly Editor Jim Agnew Music Michael Fleming ©Blacknorth Studio Ltd Production Companies Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board, RTE - Raidió Teilifís Éireann and Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon present in association with Blacknorth [2.59:1] The Curse United Kingdom 2012 Written/Directed by Fyzaal Boulifa Produced by Gavin Humphries Karim Debbagh Director of Photography Taina Galis Editors Taina Galis Fyzaal Boulifa Art Director Hicham Afghani ©The British Film Institute and Quark Films Production Companies Film4 and BFI present A Quark Films production Developed with the support of B3 Media Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund Executive Producers Marc Boothe Tracey Josephs Cast Ibtissam Zabara Fatine	Abdel Jalil Abdeloui Fatine's boyfriend Sabrina Sghiri Bushra Abdeljalil Azdour Hassan In Colour [1.66:1] Subtitles Tumult United Kingdom 2011 Written/Directed by Johnny Barrington Produced by Rhianna Andrews Cinematographer Manuel Claro Editor Maya Maffioli Production Designer Laurel Wear Music Provided by Love Triangle Composed by: William Threlfall Simon Halsberghe ©Young Films Production Companies Creative Scotland presents a Young Films production in association with Channel 4 Television Cast Ingvar E. Sigurdsson chief Dolly Wells tour guide Gisli Örn Gardarsson dark son Ivar Örn Gardarsson fair son Raymond Mearns bus driver [2.35:1] Part-subtitled I'm Fine Thanks United Kingdom 2011 Director/Animator Eamonn O'Neill ©The Royal College of Art Voices Paul Thomas Simon Roberts Joseph Tate [1.78:1]	The Making of Longbird United Kingdom 2011 Directed, Animated & Composed by Will Anderson Script Will Anderson Ainslie Henderson Vitalij Sicinava Composer Atzi Production Companies Whiterobot.co.uk ECA - Edinburgh College of Art Cast Vitalij Sicinava Longbird Tobias Feltus Feltov Will Anderson Will [1.78:1] Good Night United Kingdom 2012 Writer/Director Muriel d'Ansembourg Producer Eva Sigurdardottir Cinematographer Arturo Vasquez Editor Una Gunjak Production Designer Beck Rainford Music Jody K. Jenkins ©London Film School Production Companies A London Film School and Blindeye Films production in association with The Farm Group and The Frame University of Westminster Skillset Screen Academy UK Film Council Lottery Funded Cast Anna Hogarth Rosie Day Dave MacRae Michael Stevenson Jay Taylor
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[1.85:1] Swimmer United Kingdom 2011 Directed by Lynne Ramsay Produced by Peter Carlton Diarmid Scrimshaw Director of Photography Natasha Braier Editor Adam Biskupski Production Designer Jane Morton ©Free Swimmer Limited and the British Broadcasting Corporation Production Companies BBC Films and Film4 present in association with The London 2012 Festival funded by The National Lottery and Creative Scotland Film Extracts (Sound only) <i>If....</i> (1968) <i>Billy Liar</i> (1963)
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Films Limited A film by Lynne Ramsay Olympic Lottery Distributor Lottery Funded Supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland A Warp Films production for BBC Films and Film4 in association with the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival, using funds from the National Lottery and Creative Scotland Executive Producers Christine Langan Joe Oppenheimer Katherine Butler Ruth Mackenzie Leonie Bell Lynne Ramsay Rory Stewart Kinnear Film Extracts (Sound only) <i>If....</i> (1968) <i>Billy Liar</i> (1963)
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<i>Walkabout</i> (1970) <i>The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner</i> (1962) Cast Tom Litten the swimmer Sophie McKeeman young lover - her Oscar McVeigh young lover - him [1.85:1] All films in colour except <i>The Making of Longbird</i> (in colour and black and white) and <i>Swimmer</i> (in black and white) Distributor Independent Cinema Office
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A compilation of seven films selected from the 2013 Bafta nominations for best short animation and best short live-action film. 'Here to Fall' animates the tale of a young girl sent tumbling through a chaotic universe after receiving a call from her estranged father. 'The Curse' takes place in Morocco, where a boy spots teenager Fatine having sex with an older man; the boy and his friends threaten to expose Fatine's secret liaison unless she buys them cakes. In 'Tumult', a Viking family encounters a group of modern-day sightseers; their initial confusion soon descends into bloody confrontation. In the animation 'I'm Fine Thanks' a man struggles to cope with his failures; his frustration leads to a frenzied rage that only succeeds in bringing about his death. 'The Making of Longbird' shows a budding filmmaker's attempt to resurrect Long Bird, a popular animated character from early Russian cinema; after several setbacks, the filmmaker abandons his project, leaving the paper Long Bird to perish in a studio fire. In 'Good Night', two 14-year-old girls go nightclubbing but find themselves in compromising situations with older men. The final film, 'Swimmer', follows an endurance athlete who swims the canals and rivers of Great Britain; his observations on life on the riverbank blend into depictions of his memories and feelings.

offers narrative space for allegorical interpretation. The children are palpable as closed-minded and immature bullies, yet in some moments they appear to function as part of Fatime's subconscious. Her desire to leave the socially claustrophobic village at the start of the film comes back to haunt her as the children continue to prevent her return home.

The tension of these first two offerings is leavened slightly by Johnny Barrington's *Tumult*. Essentially a comic sketch throwing together Norse warriors and a group of contemporary sightseers, the story is mainly told from the perspective of the confused Vikings. Barrington has enough twists to prevent the story becoming one-note – but it's the sharpness of the production design, along with a strong sense of genre, stunning locations and predictably brutal denouement, that make this one of the most fun of the Bafta offerings.

Eamonn O'Neill's *I'm Fine Thanks* is much darker despite the primary colour palette of his kinetic animation. The shortest of the bunch, O'Neill's film is a speedy zip around the moments in a young man's life that have left him feeling marginalised and depressed. The film jumps swiftly between these painful formative incidents, which are repeated and reinterpreted, convincingly encapsulating the sensation of life flashing before a dying man's eyes.

O'Neill completed *I'm Fine Thanks* while at the RCA and it is one of two student films to be nominated. Will Anderson's *The Making of Longbird*, made at Edinburgh College of Art, is the other. Unlike O'Neill's film, *Longbird* limits its depiction of a frustrated young man to the experiences of writer's block. Anderson fictionalises himself attempting to resurrect a Russian animated character for the digital era. The film contrasts different animation techniques and mourns the loss of traditional cell animation. If this sometimes feels a little studious, Anderson's knowing humour prevents the film from ever feeling like an undergraduate dissertation. It won the Bafta award.

Penultimate film *Good Night* follows two teenagers who get into trouble while out in East London. It's the longest film here, and writer-director Muriel d'Ansembourg allows actors Anna Hogarth and Rosie Day to gradually develop their characters and their rapidly changing relationship over 28 minutes. The performances are impressive but the film's generous running time might have stopped this well-made drama claiming the top prize. Instead it was multiple short-film award-winner Lynne Ramsay who won the live-action category with *Swimmer*. Commissioned by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games, *Swimmer* eschews a literal depiction of the Olympics, offering instead a broader reflection on sport and physicality. Natasha Braier's black-and-white photography blends with Paul Davies's textured sound design to shape the interior world of *Swimmer*'s eponymous athlete. As he glides through the British waterways, hypnotic images provide an eloquent coda to the showcase. On the evidence of these films, the British shorts scene has much to celebrate. **S**

Bernie

USA 2011

Director: Richard Linklater



Crazed and bemused: Shirley MaLaine, Jack Black

Reviewed by Andrew Tracy

Richard Linklater's *Bernie* ends with a dedication to Lou Perryman and Eagle Pennell, the co-star and writer-director respectively of *The Whole Shootin' Match* (1978), whose success would vitalise the Texan indie-cinema scene that subsequently spawned Linklater. It's a tribute both touching and bittersweet, as Linklater, who befriended Pennell around the time of the latter's sophomore feature *Last Night at the Alamo* (1983), has greatly succeeded where Pennell sadly failed. While Linklater was able to parlay the critical acclaim accorded *Slacker* (1991) into a prolific career both inside and outside Hollywood, Pennell, continually stymied in his California dreams, eventually drank and drugged himself into career oblivion and an early grave.

Pennell's many failed bids to expand his career beyond his regional roots speak to a tension at the heart of that kind of filmmaking – the

much vaunted 'authenticity' on which regional cinema's artistic bona fides are based also sets it somewhat aside from the airier heights of cinematic art proper. It's telling how often, when regional filmmakers make the transition to international festival-circuit success, their funky local flavour begins to acquire more rarefied seasonings. Greater critical and commercial exposure can inspire more programmatic formal impulses or heighten those impulses already present in the work (Jim Jarmusch's no-wave New York deadpan fusing with Eustache and Costa, Gus Van Sant dabbling in Tarr, Haneke and Wong Kar-Wai), while reviewers' comparisons and points of reference become similarly elevated (Linklater and his fellow Texan Wes Anderson receiving plaudits for their 'Renoirian' generosity, for example).

So *Bernie*, Linklater's return to his home state after dalliances in 1930s New York (*Me and*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ginger Sledge
Richard Linklater

Producers
Celine Rattray
Martin Shafer
Liz Glotzer
Matt Williams
David McFadzean
Judd Payne
Dete Meserve

Screenplay
Richard Linklater
Skip Hollandsworth
Based on the article
in *Texas Monthly* by
Skip Hollandsworth

Director of Photography
Dick Pope
Editor
Sandra Adair
Production Designer
Bruce Curtis
Music
Graham Reynolds
Sound Mixer
John Pritchett
Costume Designer
Kari Perkins

©Bernie Film, LLC
and Wind Dancer
Bernie, LLC

Production Companies
Mandalay Vision and
Wind Dancer Films
present a Detour
Filmproduction
A Richard
Linklater film
In association
with Collins House
Productions, LLC
and Horsethief
Pictures, LLC
Executive Producers
Don Fox
Darby Parker
Jack Gilardi Jr

Johnny Lin
Ken Hirsh
William T. Conway
John Paul DeJoria
Michael Bassick
Jack R. Selby
Duncan Montgomery
John Sloss
Alex Gudim
Lissa Collins-Gudim

Cast
Jack Black
Bernie Tiede
Shirley MaLaine
Marjorie Nugent

Matthew McConaughey
Danny Buck Davidson
Brady Coleman
Scrappy Holmes
Richard Robichaux
Lloyd Hornbuckle
Rick Dial
Don Leggett
Brandon Smith
Sheriff Huckabee
Larry Jack Dotson
Reverend Woodard
Merrilee McCommas
Molly
Mathew Greer
Carl

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[L85:1]

Distributor
The Works UK
Distribution Ltd

Assistant funeral director Bernie Tiede is the most popular resident of Carthage, Texas, renowned for his sensitivity towards the bereaved, his community involvement and his free-spending generosity. In contrast, fellow Carthage resident Marjorie Nugent is mean, spiteful and widely disliked. Despite the differences in age and temperament, Bernie and the wealthy widow become inseparable friends. Mrs Nugent persuades Bernie to reduce his hours at the funeral parlour so that he can also work for her. Eventually, her possessiveness and abusiveness overcome Bernie's good nature. He shoots her and hides her body in the freezer. For the next eight

months, Bernie convinces the local community that Mrs Nugent is recovering from a series of strokes. He takes money from her bank accounts to buy extravagant gifts for the townspeople.

Finally, Mrs Nugent's suspicious stockbroker persuades the police to search her home; the body is discovered. Bernie immediately confesses to his crime; prosecutor Danny Buck Davidson has Bernie's trial moved to a neighbouring county for fear that a Carthage jury would acquit him. Bernie is sentenced to life in prison, where he devotes his time to teaching his fellow convicts to cook and making needlepoint tributes to Carthage's recently departed.

Chimpanzee

USA/United Kingdom/France 2012
Directors: Alastair Fothergill, Mark Linfield
Certificate U 78m 7s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Disneynature's latest production *Chimpanzee* is firmly in line with Disney's 1950s 'True-Life Adventures' series, which shamelessly anthropomorphised its subjects from the start in 1953's *The Living Desert*, in which footage of scorpions looped and lunched backwards and forwards to make it look as if they were dancing to the soundtrack's square-dance music. That comparatively playful approach is missing in *Chimpanzee*, which strings together (what looks to this admittedly non-nature-loving writer's eye) unexceptional footage and incoherent coverage through the inescapable glue of Tim Allen's narration.

Allen is a regular Disney employee whose voiceover serves as promotion for his *Santa Clause* and *Toy Story* franchises plus assorted features (*Wild Hogs*, *The Shaggy Dog*) from the company's library. Sometimes his commentary also seems like promotion for his role as Tim 'The Tool Man' Taylor in the too-long-enduring sitcom *Home Improvement*, co-produced by Disney's Touchstone Television and still in syndication around the world. "Mr Nut, meet Mr Rock," Allen says, observing a young chimp trying to break a nut with a rock. "Power tools," he chuckles, when heavier rocks are brought out. "Heh heh."

The imposed story concerns young Oscar, who struggles to find a new parent after his mother's death. In the manner of countless Disney productions, he succeeds in finding a surrogate father and family. Meanwhile, the tribe is threatened by enemy chimps led by one 'Scar', whose name reminds parents to cue up *The Lion King* the next time their own offspring are bored. ☹



Wanna be like you: 'Chimpanzee'

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alastair Fothergill
Mark Linfield
Alix Tidmarsh
Written by
Mark Linfield
Alastair Fothergill
Don Hahn
Directors of Photography
Ivory Coast:
Martyn Colbeck
Uganda:
Bill Wallauer
Edited by
Andy Netley

Music
Nicholas Hooper
Sound Recordist
Kristin Mosher

©Disney
Enterprises, Inc.
Production Companies
Disneynature
presents a Great
Ape production
Executive Producer
Don Hahn

narrator
Tim Allen

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista
International (UK)

7,030 ft +8 frames

A documentary about chimpanzees in Africa. Young Oscar is endangered after the death of his mother Isha. With no one to take care of him, Oscar is eventually adopted by tribe leader Freddy. Freddy and the tribe are threatened by the advance of a group of enemy chimpanzees led by Scar, but manage to defeat them. A few months later, Oscar is still in Freddy's care and the tribe is thriving.

The Croods

USA 2013
Director: Chris Sanders, Kirk DeMico
Certificate U 98m 30s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

There's a small irony in the central theme of *The Croods*, in which a family of Neanderthals have to embrace change or die as their world crumbles around them. It's produced by DreamWorks, whose static creative formula was cruelly summed up by an Eatliver.com cartoon as: "Uhh, there are talking animals. And they do things animals don't normally do. And they all make *this* face." Kirk DeMico and Chris Sanders's affable (if unsurprising) caveman comedy may opt for human-family dynamics over wisecracking Pliocene mammals (see the *Ice Age* films) but this journey tale still follows some well-trodden paths – the only things breaking new ground here are the expertly rendered earthquakes.

Prehistory doesn't offer many plot options. So the Crood family are chased from their habitat *Ice Age*-style by an enviro-apocalypse, this time the shifting of tectonic plates. With rumbling rockfalls, explosive earth tremors and lava-filled ravines, this is the 3D gift that keeps on giving. Imaginative, almost painterly animation turns the earth's eruptions into jaw-dropping, ember-scattering spectacle, but infrequently enough to allow the film's humour breathing room.

Like the Flintstones, the Croods are a bickering nuclear family transposed into tiger skins, though their smart character design differentiates them neatly (quadruped speed, low brows, brute strength) from Homo-sapiens inventor boy-hunk Guy, added by lovesick teenager Eep to their travelling band. If troublesome-teen gags are the film's predictable fallback, the real nub of the story is the struggle between Guy's innovative thinking and paterfamilias Grug's refusal to abandon his safety-first status quo: "New is always bad. Never don't be afraid."

But *The Croods*, whose warm, visual humour and deft slapstick skew it towards younger children, prefers its ideas ultimately unthreatening, like its danger-strewn but never terrifying world. Grug, outpaced by Homo-sapiens ingenuity, must adapt to survive; yet his wobbly patriarchal authority is restored when the group need him to fling them to safety. What elevates Grug beyond the dumb-dad stereotype is Nic Cage's standout voicework, both funny and touching as he ineptly chivvies his flock to safety. He and Emma Stone's quicksilver Eep are the film's only fully honed characters, however, the rest of the family being one-note jokes like annoying Gran ("Animals you don't eat? We call them children") and dim-bulb brother Thunk.

Where the film scores is in its imaginative visualisation of a succession of new-world landscapes, vibrant tropical rainforests or tunnel mazes filled with outlandish hybrid animals – land-whales, owl-bears, piranha-birds. There's a welcome sense of wonder and charm in its discoveries, after the slick, pop-culture sensibility of recent animated features. Similarly, the film's frankly gorgeous animation, lushly coloured and subtly lit (consultant Roger Deakins gives us sparking dawns, fluid fires, a canopy of soft stars), is a significant advance on the Day-Glo pulsing palettes of *Wreck-It Ralph* or *Madagascar 3*. Equally sensitively modulated 3D sequences are also a revelation. For every cliff-top tumble or kinetic egg-chase choreographed like an

Orson Welles, 2008), the Dickian future-present (*A Scanner Darkly*, 2006) and a realm of protean dreamscapes (*Waking Life*, 2001), clearly bears the mark of those far-flung travels and variably ambitious ventures. "What you're fixin' to see here is a true story," announce the sly opening titles – a declaration of authenticity that automatically (and idiomatically) places the story in the at-the-very-least semi-fictional realm of the tall tale. And as per that consciously exaggerated folksiness, *Bernie's* particular authenticity revels in the free play of fact and fabrication: its chronicle of beloved Texas funeral director Bernie Tiede's unlikely friendship with, and eventual murder of, despised wealthy widow Marjorie Nugent (Shirley MacLaine) is punctuated by interviews both with real-life residents of Bernie's hometown of Carthage and 'interviews' with actors playing real-life characters, while many of those real residents subsequently play themselves in narrative scenes proper.

From its first scene, in which Jack Black's jovial Bernie takes the stage in front of a mortuary science class to demonstrate the properly sensitive way to prepare the recently deceased for display, *Bernie* is, among other things, a film about performance – about how we present ourselves or, in the case of the dearly departed, are presented in public. "He had a real knack for drama," enthuses one of the real-life Carthage residents of Bernie – a sentiment that darkly boomerangs when preening district attorney Danny Buck Davidson (Matthew McConaughey, hilarious) declares in his summation at Bernie's trial that "Bernie Tiede is a calculating, evil actor... he fooled this whole town." Whether formally – presiding at funerals, lending his golden voice to Sunday services and community musicals and, finally, testifying at his murder trial – or informally in his everyday interactions, Bernie is always playing to an audience; and it's part of the brilliance of Black's skilled and wholly endearing performance that it's impossible to banish one's awareness of his persona as malevolent, troubadouring jester-demon. (When he sings of the "master of the sea" in a hymnal, one almost expects him to veer off into a ridiculous Tenacious D myth-rock opus.)

Yet despite all of *Bernie's* upfront formal play, Linklater isn't indulging in any kind of postmodern navel-gazing. The play between fiction and non-fiction that constitutes the film's narrative dynamic is precisely that: play, not an 'undermining' or 'interrogation' of the 'codes' of fictional/non-fictional filmmaking. Just as Linklater's double-decade-spanning *Before...* triptych is as much a documentary about its actors as a continuing story about its characters, *Bernie* intuitively understands the intrinsic permeability between fiction and fact – a truth attested to by the presence of Sonny Davis, the other star of Pennell's *Shootin' Match* and *Alamo*, authentically playing himself as one of the authentic Texans interviewed about the authentic Bernie Tiede affair. In the face of the strenuous and ostentatious 'realism' of films such as *Argo* and *Zero Dark Thirty*, it's instructive that Linklater, like any accomplished artist regional or otherwise, realises that authenticity is, and can only be, a greater or lesser element in his fabrications rather than an end of itself. ☹



Tunnel vision: 'The Croods'

American football game, there is 'soft' 3D of floating embers, dust motes or flower petals, adding atmosphere rather than vertigo.

Thematically *The Croods* is a jaunty, none-too-subtle reminder that our own world is being transformed by the digital youthquake. Guy, with his shell-call 'phones' and fire-stones, is the Zuckerberg of the Palaeolithic era. The film's saving grace is that it makes us marvel at the simple wonders of worlds both old and new. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kristine Belson
Jane Hartwell
Screenplay
Kirk DeMico
Chris Sanders

Story
John Cleese
Kirk DeMico
Chris Sanders
Visual Consultant
Roger Deakins
Editor
Darren Holmes
Production Designer
Christophe Lautrette
Music Composed and Conducted by
Alan Silvestri
Sound Designer
Eep
Randy Thom
Animation Supervisors

Line K. Andersen
Hans Dastrup
Jakob Hjort Jensen
Fredrik Nilsson
Kristof Serrand
Sean Sexton

@DreamWorks
Animation LLC
Production Company
DreamWorks
Animation SKG
presents

Cast

Nicolas Cage
Grug
Emma Stone
Eep
Ryan Reynolds
Guy

Catherine Keener
Ugga
Chloris Leachman
Gran
Clark Duke
Thunk
Chris Sanders
Belt

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]
[1.44:1] - IMAX
prints

Some screenings
presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

8,865 ft +0 frames

Earth, prehistoric times. Neanderthal teenager Eep Crood is frustrated by her father Grug's insistence on keeping the family confined to their cave for safety. She meets Guy, a Homo-sapiens teenager who shows her fire and reveals that the world is ending. When a giant earth tremor buries their cave, the Crood family jump into the subterranean tropical forest that emerges. Guy, summoned by Eep's shell-call, saves the family from flesh-eating birds by making fire. Though Grug disapproves, Guy suggests they trek to the faraway high mountains. The family, except Grug, start to enjoy Guy's ideas and new inventions as they cross lagoons and plains and dodge giant hybrid animals and carnivorous plants. Jealous of Guy, Grug tries to copy him. After falling into a tar pit while fighting, Grug and Guy bond, and fool a giant cat into releasing them. As the collapsing world catches up with them, a lava-filled ravine separates the group from freedom. Grug throws them all singly across the gap, then makes a giant bird-powered skeleton-helicopter to cross the ravine himself. He reunites with his family, and they all make their home on a beach at the continent's edge.

Dark Skies

United Kingdom/USA/Canada 2012

Director: Scott Stewart

Certificate 15 96m 53s

Reviewed by Carmen Gray

Writer-director Scott Stewart was behind derivative dystopian genre mash-ups *Legion* (2009) and *Priest* (2011), and his latest film *Dark Skies* is no departure, exploiting as it does numerous clichés from familiar sci-fi and horror predecessors to workmanlike effect but with zero spark of innovation.

Sharing a producer with *Paranormal Activity* and *Insidious*, the film similarly draws fear from supernatural home invasion. Out-of-work architect Daniel (a nondescript Josh Hamilton) and real-estate agent Lacy (Keri Russell, who brings more chutzpah to the little the screenplay offers) are going through a rough spot in their marriage, compounded by the stress of financial problems. This has unsettled their two boys, Jesse (Dakota Goyo) and Sammy (Kadan Rockett). Strange night-time phenomena in the house soon augment the domestic discord.

Classic fright scenes have been co-opted unashamedly: towers of packaged produce in the family's kitchen are eerily stacked so that their shadows make signs on the ceiling, recalling *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999); the startling flocks pounding into the windows (one of the most effective scares) are all Hitchcock; and the trance-like blackouts of family members ape a whole lineage of possession films. The presence of surveillance-era technology means that all this happens within a matrix of security cameras and alarm systems whose registering of strange activity only adds to the siege-like sense of threat. A nerve-shredding tension, aided by stabs of music at choice moments, is maintained throughout, though the indiscriminate mixing of disparate tried-and-true tricks results in an incoherent hodgepodge lacking narrative finesse.

Sammy's claims of being visited by 'the Sandman' suggest that we're in for a modern, dark twist on folk legend, but the power of Google reveals to Lacy fairly early on that aliens are the likely culprits. Her suspicions are validated by a

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jason Blum
Written by
Scott Stewart
Cinematographer
David Boyd
Edited by
Peter Gvozdas
Production Designer
Jeffrey Higinbotham
Music
Joseph Bishara

Production Sound Mixer
Buck Robinson
Costume Designer
Kelle Kutsugeras
@Alliance Films (UK)
Dark Skies Limited
Production Companies
Alliance Films
presents in

association with IM
Global a Blumhouse
and Robotproof
production
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Scott Stewart
Charles Layton
Brian Kavanaugh-Jones
Jeff Okin

Cast
Keri Russell
Lacy Barrett
Josh Hamilton
Daniel Barrett
Dakota Goyo
Jesse Barrett
Kadan Rockett
Sam Barrett
Josh Stamberg
police officer

LJ Benet
Kevin Ratner
J.K. Simmons
Edwin Pollard
Rich Hutchman
Mike Jessop
Myndy Crist
Karen Jessop
Annie Thurman
Shelly Jessop
Jake Washburn
Bobby Jessop

Ron Ostrow
Richard Klein

Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures
8,719 ft +8 frames

Arizona, present day. Unemployed architect Daniel and real-estate agent Lacy, who are under marital and financial strain, begin to experience strange night-time disturbances in the home they share with sons Jesse and Sammy. The refrigerator is raided; products are stacked in eerie formations; family photographs vanish from their frames. Sammy claims that a being called the Sandman visits him in his dreams. The security system indicates home intrusion at all entry points simultaneously, while video cameras reveal a strange shifting energy force. The family members all experience trance-like episodes and notice unexplained bruising. Birds fly into the windows. Lacy sees a dark figure standing over Sammy's bed. Internet research leads her to specialist Edwin Pollard,



Bodysnatchers: Keri Russell, Kadan Rockett

visit to self-appointed expert Edwin Pollard (J.K. Simmons, whose character seems too closely modelled in dress and mannerisms on Hunter S. Thompson). He's been studying abductions for years and has a wall covered in newspaper clippings. Pollard warns that an extraterrestrial race has been observing the family for some time, preparing for an abduction – but, he says, in rare cases resistance by a unified family can prevent a child being snatched.

This provides all the justification the film seems to need to become a gun lobbyist's dream, a conservative-inflected scare-campaign for the nuclear family's sacred status. Having shopped for an Alsatian and a shotgun "that packs a lot of punch at close range", husband and wife barricade themselves and their children in their house and gather round the table for a hearty Fourth of July dinner, awaiting the aliens vigilantly. There's an end twist – but it does little more than leave the door ajar for a wholly unnecessary sequel. **S**

who attributes these phenomena to alien invasion, saying that an extraterrestrial race, the Greys, has been observing them for some time and controlling them through implants behind their ears. He warns that an abduction is imminent, and that only a united family defence can thwart it. Lacy and Daniel buy shotguns and barricade the family in the house. The Greys infiltrate the home and a struggle ensues. Jesse is taken. The family, regarded as suspects in his disappearance, move house. Sorting through Jesse's belongings, Lacy finds evidence that he interacted with the Greys from a young age, and she links this to his long illness. A transmission from the walkie-talkie with which Jesse used to communicate with Sammy announces that 'they' are coming.

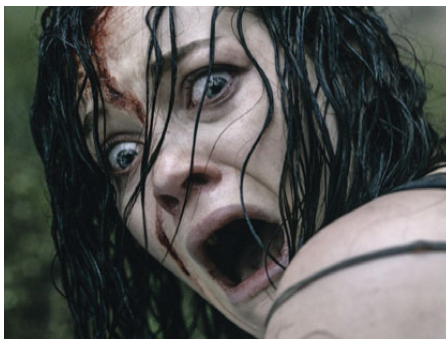
Evil Dead

USA/New Zealand 2013
Director: Fede Alvarez
Certificate 18 91m 28s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The current cycle of horror remakes, reimagining every classic (or half-remembered) title from the 1970s and 1980s, is now itself a decade old. Marcus Nispel's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) and Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) set the tone for 'contemporary' treatments of the era of horror bounded by *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Night of the Living Dead* (1990) – cast with attractive TV stars and interesting character actors, crafted like gritty thrill rides, denuded of specific social or political content and mounted with relatively decent production values and a sense of quality often lacking in the lower-budgeted originals. Ten years on, the law of diminishing returns means that the cycle has yielded too many unmemorable redos of the likes of *When a Stranger Calls* and *Prom Night*, plus genuinely disastrous takes on *Halloween* and *It's Alive*.

Unlike many remakes, which assume that their audiences haven't seen or can barely remember the property being tarted up, Fede Alvarez's *Evil Dead* counts on a certain familiarity with Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1982) and its sequels, *Evil Dead II* (1987) and *Army of Darkness* (1992). For example, after the film's horrors have shifted into overdrive, the most culpable character sets fire to the magic book that's responsible for the summoning of demons – the method by which the evil dead were dispelled in 1982 – and the pages refuse to burn. The five kids here aren't quite analogues of the original characters, and several candidates are put forward as successors to Bruce Campbell's Ash, the series's much put-upon lead. The twist – that it's ex-junkie Mia rather than her straighter brother David who becomes the Ash surrogate in the climax – gets away from one of the more unusual aspects of *The Evil Dead* (putting a man in the 'final girl' role) by defaulting to business as usual as Jane Levy (scarcely a credible heroin addict but game enough with power tools) loses a hand but still wields a chainsaw in a manner that Campbell, appearing after the end credits, approves with one of his signature lines ("Groovy").



Touch of evil: Jane Levy

Alvarez restages key images from Raimi's film (the possessed sister lifting the chained-down cellar door to leer at her friends) and even from its publicity campaign (a much reproduced still of a woman pulling herself out of a grave) but comes up with new cringe-making horrors – a scalding shower rather than a pencil in the ankle, for instance – and goes for a grimmer, less joshing tone. In his sequels, Raimi has already remade *The Evil Dead* with added slapstick, so Alvarez deliberately avoids that route. The possessions are depicted with the sort of horrid, bone-cracking contortions found in latterday demon movies like *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) and *The Devil Inside* (2012), and the fun is inhibited by calculatedly upsetting details such as one character's bladder letting go as she is overwhelmed by the evil force and prompted to cut off her cheek with a shard of broken mirror. When her horrified boyfriend steps on the cut-off flesh and slips, this variant on the classic banana-peel gag elicits a jolt rather than a laugh.

If this *Evil Dead* is a return to form, it's not because it aspires to the achievement of *The Evil Dead* but because it works on the level of such solid makeovers as Nispel's *Chainsaw* or Alexandre Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) rather than joining the ranks of flagging, desperate offshoots like the recent *Texas Chainsaw 3D*. It's a product picture, but an efficiently packaged one. Ⓢ

The Eye of the Storm

Australia/United Kingdom 2011
Director: Fred Schepisi

Reviewed by Jane Lamcraft

Introduced to the central characters in Fred Schepisi's adaptation of the 1973 Patrick White novel *The Eye of the Storm*, you could be forgiven for not wanting to stick around with them for the rest of the movie. Middle-aged siblings Basil and Dorothy (variously vain, selfish, weak, self-pitying) have arrived back in Sydney to reunite with their elderly ma Elizabeth (imperious, spoilt, spectacularly self-centred), bedridden since a stroke and dying in the lap of luxury in her overstuffed mansion. Many of the characters at the edge of this triptych of human turpitude are distinctly flawed too, from actor Basil's ghastly thespian friends to perky young nurse Flora (played with spirit by Schepisi's daughter Alexandra), who plumps Elizabeth's pillows while helping herself to the old lady's couture wardrobe.

The "kiddies", as Elizabeth insists on calling them, have been drawn back (from England and France respectively) less by any fondness for their wealthy mother than by concern for their inheritance. It's easy to see why so little love is lost: barely have the hellos been said than Elizabeth's cruel barbs begin, elegantly but viciously delivered, as when she pointedly reminds Basil of his disastrous Lear (a character who echoes here). To her daughter: "What have you done to your hair?"

Rather disconcertingly, this "ancient ruin of a mummy" is played by Charlotte Rampling, all too clearly neither ancient nor ruined, despite the lilac wig. Her casting makes more sense, though, when we see her in flashbacks as her younger, bewitching, man-magnet self. We assume from these glimpses into the past – and from heavily signalled clues – that a dark secret is to be revealed. "Is it better," Basil asks in voiceover, "to lock loveless misery in a box buried deep in a bedroom closet with all the other memories of childhood? Or is it braver to take it out and examine it in a more forgiving light?" Shots of maggots in fruit or flies trapped in jars of preserves further hint at something rotten at the heart of this family. Skeletons, we feel, will be clattering out of cupboards anytime soon. But when it finally comes, the storm of the title is more squall than tempest. The big reveal, it seems, is that simply to be alive is to be at the eye of the storm.

Geoffrey Rush makes Basil hollow,



Money matters: Geoffrey Rush

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rob Tapert
Sam Raimi
Bruce Campbell
Screenplay
Fede Alvarez
Rodo Sayagues
Based on the motion picture *The Evil Dead* written by Sam Raimi
Director of Photography
Aaron Morton
Film Editor
Bryan Shaw
Production Designer
Robert Gillies
Music
Roque Baños
Production Mixer
Myk Farmer
Costume Designer
Sarah Voon

©Evil Dead, LLC
Production Companies
TriStar Pictures, FilmDistrict and

Ghost House Pictures presents
With the assistance of the New Zealand Large Budget Screen Production Grant
Executive Producers
Nathan Kahane
Joe Drake
J.R. Young
Peter Schlessel

Cast
Jane Levy
Mia
Shiloh Fernandez
David
Lou Taylor Pucci
Eric
Jessica Lucas
Olivia
Elizabeth Blackmore
Natalie
Phoenix Connolly
teenager
Jim McLarty
Harold

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited
8,232 ft +0 frames

Michigan, present day. A professor of the occult exorcises a demon from his possessed daughter by burning her alive in the basement of a cabin. Sometime later a group of young people arrive to spend a weekend at the same cabin – mechanic David and his girlfriend Natalie join David's old friends Eric, a teacher, and Olivia, a nurse, in supporting David's sister Mia in her resolution to beat her heroin addiction. In the basement, they find a magic book; Eric reads aloud from it, summoning a demon. After suffering withdrawal symptoms, Mia tries to leave but crashes the car and is possessed by the demon. She injures herself in a scalding shower. The others find that a rainstorm has washed out a bridge, trapping them all at the cabin. Olivia, also possessed by the demon, mutilates herself and then attacks Eric, forcing him to kill her. David, Eric and Natalie fend off the demon Mia. When Eric and Natalie are also possessed, David fights them. David learns from the book that the demon can be dispelled if the possessed person is buried alive; he puts his possessed sister in a shallow grave, then uses a homemade defibrillator to bring her back to life free of the evil spirit. Mia now has to destroy her possessed friends to avert a demonic apocalypse.

← pompous and absurd, while Judy Davis shines as Dorothy, the daughter forever outshone. Schepisi (directing his first feature since 2003's Kirk/Michael/Cameron Douglas vehicle *It Runs in the Family*) seeps his Sydney in 70s olives and ochres and cuts cleverly between his three main characters past and present. And by the end you very, very nearly care about them. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Antony Waddington
Gregory Read
Fred Schepisi
Screenplay
Judy Morris
Based on the novel
by Patrick White
**Director of
Photography**
Ian Baker
Edited by
Kate Williams
**Production
Designer**
Melinda Doring
Music
Paul Grabowsky
**Production
Sound Mixer**
John Wilkinson
Costume Designer
Terry Ryan

©Paper Bark Films
EOS Pty Ltd
**Production
Companies**
An Antony
Waddington
presentation in
association with
RMB Productions
and Australian
Broadcasting

Corporation
A Paper Bark Films
production
A Fred Schepisi film
Made with the
assistance of
Screen Australia
and Film Victoria
Media Productions
(International)
Limited
Co-produced
with Ingenious
Broadcasting
Produced in
association
with Australian
Broadcasting
Corporation
Developed and
financed with
the assistance of
Screen Australia
Executive

Produced by
Jonathan Shteinman
Edward Simpson
**Executive
Producers**
Bob Marcs
James Vernon
Geoffrey Rush
Judy Davis
Andrew Mackie
Richard Payten

Cast

Geoffrey Rush
Sir Basil Hunter
Charlotte Rampling
Elizabeth Hunter
Judy Davis
Dorothy de
Lascabanes
Alexandra Schepisi
Flora
Helen Morse
Lotte
John Gaden
Arnold Wyburd
Robyn Nevin
Lal Wyburd
Colin Friels
Athol Shreve
Maria Theodorakis
Mary
Bille Brown
Dudley
Jane Menelaus
Maggie
Dustin Clare
Col
Martin Lynes
Edward

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Munro Film Services

Sydney, 1972. Middle-aged siblings Basil and Dorothy Hunter have returned from abroad to visit their wealthy mother Elizabeth, bedridden following a stroke and cared for by nurses Flora and Mary and housekeeper Lotte. Basil is a stage actor based in England; Dorothy is divorced from her aristocrat French husband. The relationship between the siblings and their mother is strained, and it becomes clear that Elizabeth's behaviour in the past has caused great unhappiness, especially for Dorothy – we flashback intermittently to an incident years earlier, when Dorothy and then boyfriend Edward stayed with Elizabeth on a tropical Queensland island.

Though Flora has a boyfriend, Col, she flirts with Basil and they start sleeping together; she stops taking the Pill and becomes pregnant. However, when Basil humiliates her in front of his actor friends, she runs off.

When the wife of Elizabeth's lawyer Arnold Wyburd visits, Elizabeth deliberately lets slip that she and Arnold once had an affair. Basil and Dorothy drive to the country house where they grew up. Dorothy remembers walking in on her mother and Edward making love while they were on the island years before; she becomes distressed, and when Basil comforts her they sleep together. Elizabeth tells Arnold that she wants to leave all her money to him. She recalls the incident on the island: after Dorothy and Edward left her there alone, a tropical storm struck. She survived by hiding in an underground shelter.

Back in Sydney, Dorothy reconciles with Elizabeth moments before her death. Lotte kills herself. Flora, who has miscarried, returns to Col. Arnold tells Basil and Dorothy that their mother has left the money to them. Dorothy makes clear to Basil that what happened between them at the country house must never recur.

First Position

USA 2011
Director: Bess Kargman
Certificate U 94m 40s



Bound to succeed: 'First position'

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

First Position has a clever double meaning: winning but also starting at the bottom. Technically, it refers to ballet's deceptively simple first stance, the basis of its language. In this documentary about aspiring dancers, we see talented student Joan Sebastian teach it to his younger brother Alejandro on a rare visit from New York back home to Colombia. He lines Alejo up against the foot of the bed to get the turnout of his feet; Alejo tumbles backwards as his legs rotate unnaturally. It's a comic moment conveying the mind-boggling difficulty of even the most basic step.

Other reflections include a montage of foot injuries that out-grosses the *Saw* films, as well as dancers being smacked in class, dancing on fractures and doing maths homework while in full splits. Beyond the physical pain, *First Position*

focuses on the psychological and emotional drain of competing at the Youth America Grand Prix. First-time filmmaker Bess Kargman sensibly eschews the high-drama histrionics of *The X Factor* in favour of protagonists who are balanced and reflective, albeit relentless. We see tears backstage, but not from the seven dancers who make up the focus of the film. Rather than being asked to sympathise with them, we are asked to respect them and their choice to become dancers.

That the film commands this respect is a triumph of dispassionate camerawork and subtle editing, as there are few narrative twists or hard-hitting exposés on offer. A few adults pass comment on the financial burden of supporting a competitive ballet student, and on the parlous state of ballet's own finances, but mostly the camera is there for its well-chosen young subjects

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bess Kargman
**Director of
Photography**
Nick Higgins
Edited by
Kate Amend
Bess Kargman

Music
Chris Hajian
Sound Mixer
Eric Thomas

©First Position
Films, LLC
Production

Companies
A Bess Kargman
production
Supported by the
Manhattan Movement
& Arts Center
Executive Producer
Rose Caiola

With
Aran Bell
Rebecca
Houseknecht
Joan Sebastian
Zamora
Miko Fogarty
Jules Jarvis Fogarty

Michaela DePrince
Gaya Bommer
Yemini

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye Film
Company

8,520 ft +0 frames

A documentary following seven ballet students taking part in the Youth America Grand Prix, a prestigious event in which competitors can win scholarships and jobs. Most of the students are American or US-based but they represent the emerging diversity of contemporary classical dance: 17-year-old Rebecca Houseknecht, known to schoolfriends as Barbie, is a blonde from Middle America; Joan Sebastian Zamora moved from Colombia at 14 to train in the US; Michaela DePrince is a Sierra Leonean orphan adopted by an American couple; Aran Bell, whose

father is in the US Navy, has moved from California to Kuwait to Naples, where he meets fellow 11-year-old dancer Gaya Bommer Yemini from Israel; Miko and Jules 'JJ' Fogarty are mixed-race siblings.

The dancers withstand gruelling hours of training and parental pressure to reach the regional semi-finals, where we see them qualify. Before the finals in New York, Joan visits his family in Colombia; JJ quits ballet, upsetting his mother; and Michaela suffers severe tendonitis. All except JJ perform in the finals and are among the prizewinners.

Flying Blind

United Kingdom 2012
Director: Katarzyna Klimkiewicz

to give accounts of themselves, verbally and choreographically. With Joan Sebastian, whose family is relying on him to succeed and send money home, and Michaela, a Sierra Leonean war orphan adopted by an American couple, the film risks asking for pity, but they both have such electric presence on and off stage that, like the film, we focus on their dance.

Both of them deservedly win scholarships to top schools, an outcome signalled throughout the film; yet Joan Sebastian's arrival at the Royal Ballet School in London is incredibly moving – for all the heavyhanded symbolism of filming him on the school's 'Bridge of Aspiration' in Covent Garden – perhaps because his arrival conveys the title's double meaning. Joan Sebastian won but he's also starting again, in a new country, competing for a vanishingly small number of professional positions.

It's equally unsubtle, yet telling, to close the story of prizewinning 12-year-old Miko with a shot of her mother remarking that she needs to be stretched, followed by a shot of Miko's brother JJ saying that, since quitting ballet, he's being coached for the Ivy League. And yet these seem of a piece with ballet – both the emotional storylines of the dances, and the fierce, ruthless intensity of the professional world. When Miko's coach Viktor announces that he's "freaking happy" about her finals performance, he sounds like a Terminator.

It's in Aran's story, which opens the film, that this monomania is perhaps best observed. Aran first appears pogoing and riding a unicycle – not for fun, we realise, but as part of his training. His father has, his mother tells us, been structuring his career in the US Navy around Aran's need to be near a dance school. Living in Naples, Aran orders his dance costumes from Chicago. Yet he's also generous: after the prize-giving, he doesn't want to talk about his own nervy moment of thinking he's missed out, but to make sure that his friend Gaya, who speaks Hebrew, has fully realised that she's won bronze.

The end credits sequence, as expected, updates the viewer on the dancers' progress, including reassurance that pink-loving all-American princess Rebecca has received a belated callback from the Washington Ballet. More tellingly, Aran appears to have taken a leaf out of Gaya's book and is rehearsing a comic, contemporary choreography that seems more fitting for a pre-teen than the grand romantic solos. The kids, the film suggests, are all right both because they are talented and dedicated dancers, and because they are human beings who see ballet as a way of creating beauty in a chaotic and unjust world.

Despite its conventional narrative and generally flat digital cinematography (not helped by shooting in dingy studios), *First Position* deserves an audience wider than wannabe dancers and armchair balletomanes as it demystifies this elite artform. Like *Man on Wire* (2008), it's a study of artistic and physical dedication; like the dancers it follows, it has the gift of balance. While clear about the economic and physical costs of a dance career, the film allows us to enter into the protagonists' perspective – to stretch ourselves imaginatively as they do physically. 



An affair to remember: Najib Oudghiri, Helen McCrory

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This cool, solemn drama commences with an image – self-assured aeronautical engineer Frankie (Helen McCrory) positioned in a wind tunnel, hair blown wild and face set firm – the rakish swagger of which will not be much replicated in the film that follows. Frankie's fraught affair with Algerian student Kahil (Najib Oudghiri), which interacts awkwardly with daylight hours spent designing killer drones for the Ministry of Defence, is for the most part rendered in tones as muted as the steely palette deployed by cinematographer Andrzej Wojciechowski. What initially registers as an

across-the-barricades love affair (ostensibly irresistibly passionate but portrayed in a disapproving manner suggestive of exploitation or inappropriateness on one side or the other, recalling almost any affair in a Hanif Kureishi script) becomes a political minefield, as Frankie finds her lover being investigated by the MoD as a 'person of interest', and herself under suspicion as an accessory. The mood throughout is sad and edgy; and while the development of the story is unpredictable and broadly compelling, the tone – as Frankie succumbs to paranoia and fails to stand by her man – turns into something a little frowny and self-righteous. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alison Sterling
Written by
Naomi Wallace
Bruce McLeod
Caroline Harrington
Director of Photography
Andrzej
Wojciechowski
Film Editor
Ewa J. Lind
Production Designer
Alison Riva

Composer
Jon Wygens
Location Sound Mixer
Alan O'Duffy
Costume Designer
Saffron Webb

@iFeatures Limited and BBC
Production Companies
South West Screen and BBC Films

present in association with Matador Pictures, Cinema Six, Regent Capital and City of Bristol an Ignition Films/iFeatures production Developed with the assistance of South West Screen through the Regional Investment Fund for England/BBC Films Made with the

support of Bristol City Council
Executive Producers
Christopher Moll
Steve Jenkins
Charlotte Walls

Cast
Helen McCrory
Frankie
Najib Oudghiri
Kahil

Kenneth Cranham
Victor
Tristan Gemmill
Robert
Sheriff Eltayeb
Malik
Philippa Howard
Nina Simons
Lorcan Cranitch
Duncan Morehouse
Razane Jammal
Dima
Cameron Stewart
Andrew Dockings

Glyn Grimstead
Terry
Sam Ellis
DC Harry Dixon

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Bristol, the present. Engineer Frankie is working on the design of more efficient drones for the Ministry of Defence. After delivering a lecture to students, she finds herself without her car keys; a young man, Kahil, helps her. Days later she runs into him again and offers to lend him a textbook; he buys her a fast-food dinner and returns to her house with her. A seduction commences but he departs abruptly, leaving a note in Arabic which, when she has it translated, proves to be love poetry. She tracks him down and they make love; asked about scars on his body, he gives no reply. Separating on the street, they are observed by Frankie's father. Eating out together, they run into Kahil's ex-girlfriend from Algeria; the two speak in Arabic and Frankie is jealous. Frankie's father asks her if it's wise for her to have an Arab boyfriend. Making a surprise visit, Frankie sees Kahil dropping off taxi customers. She phones the

university and finds that he isn't registered as a student. Confronting him, she establishes that he has dropped out and is in the country illegally, driving a cab. Frankie offers him work repainting her flat. On her way into work she is stopped and questioned by an MoD staff member. It transpires that Kahil and his friends are considered 'persons of interest'. Frankie finds extremist websites on Kahil's laptop; they fight and break up, but soon reconcile. She finds guns hidden in his bathroom, tells her father, and they inform the police, who reveal that Kahil spent time in prison in Algeria. Frankie finds Kahil's ex, who explains that he was a socialist student leader, and says that the guns weren't his. Frankie goes to see Kahil again, but armed police raid his home and arrest him. Frankie's father admits that he alerted the authorities on first seeing the couple. Kahil is deported; Frankie watches the plane leave.

McCrory, with her cut-glass accent, raucous laugh and beauty by turns severe and cherubic, is good casting for a character shuttling between staunch self-control and recklessness. But Frankie's mercurial mood changes also frustrate the viewer, who, compelled by the film's subplotless intimacy to observe rather closely her actions and apparent motivations, may be driven to wonder why a woman so professionally uncompromising and sexually assertive would be so quick to shed all trust in her own judgement and buy the flimsily supported theories of others in this sole matter. Frankie is in her forties; though the film sensibly avoids giving her an overdetermined backstory, we may assume that she's dealt before with flings and infatuations. Indeed, we know she doesn't suffer inadequacy – or sensitivity – gladly: "He cried and said 'thank you' after sex," is how she sums up a recent boyfriend's limitations to a colleague. Kahil is cute and everything, but are we really to accept that this callow, shaggy bedsit-dweller would waltz so easily past her defences? Or that, working in the field she does and presumably spending a lot of time abiding by the Official Secrets Act and being security-cleared, she wouldn't have developed a bit of a radar – not for Muslims, necessarily, but for students, intellectuals or journalists who might have a not-entirely-sympathetic interest in the highly ethically sympathetic matter of killing people from a distance?

Frankie's lack of engagement with the humanitarian cost of her work is glancingly covered at the film's start, when we see her answer a student's question on the matter with the evasive assertion that "none of us is outside the military-industrial complex" and the glib self-justification that "I'm not a philosopher; I'm interested in the beauty of flight rather than our ability to fight." But beyond this public disingenuousness, one feels that this smart, spiky woman would be a touch more prepared than she seems for negative reactions to her area of expertise.

These are the wrong expectations, perhaps, for a film seemingly intended to function largely on the level of allegory – but what it's saying allegorically is a little thin too. Appearances can be deceptive? East is east and west is west and never the twain shall hump passionately against a windowpane without racism coming along to taint the idyll? Arms manufacturers might want to consider the function as well as the form of the objects they design?

A low-budget film constructed with discipline and confidence, and featuring a lead performance from McCrory that makes you wish she got more of them, *Flying Blind* has much to recommend it. The ambiguity it brings to its central relationship is sporadically intriguing, despite chemistry that doesn't fire as strongly as must have been intended. However, its lack of humour renders its mood a little lifeless, and in the end, just as its heroine proves to be more gooey than her striking opening appearance suggests, it leans towards why-can't-we-all-just-get-along weepiness rather than a truly rigorous engagement with the issues it raises. Ⓢ

Fuck for Forest

Poland/Germany 2012
Director: Michal Marczak
Certificate 18 86m 14s

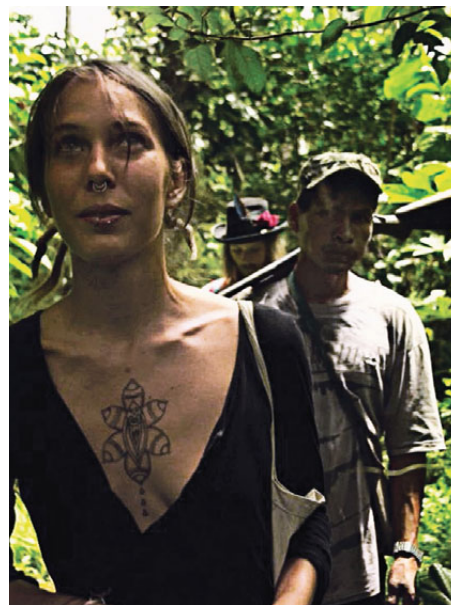
Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Given its subject-matter, you might have expected Michal Marczak's film to be titillating, prurient or sensationalist in tone. It's a documentary about the Berlin-based "erotic, non-profit ecological organisation" Fuck for Forest, which uses pornography to raise money for environmental causes. 'Have Sex, Save the World' is one of its slogans.

Young Polish director Marczak can't resist satirising FFF's activities, and there's a deadpan, very dry voiceover running sparingly throughout the documentary which suggests that he's struggling to take the group altogether seriously. However, he resists the temptation to mock his protagonists. This is a traditional observational documentary in the style of the Maysles brothers or D.A. Pennebaker, and whether filming FFF in underground Berlin nightclubs or deep in the Amazon rainforest, he shoots in the same matter-of-fact way. The group clearly accept him and behave in a natural way on camera.

One of the frustrations of the film is its lack of context. Marczak doesn't provide us with a potted history of FFF or give us much sense of when he started filming or why. Instead, we see the group's activities from the perspective of Danny, a young Norwegian who used to be a champion horse-rider but has rebelled against his bourgeois background.

FFF's politics and worldview seem painfully simplistic. This is a group riven by contradictions – the founders are idealists and yet they're part of the porn industry. As they talk about sperm and blood while decrying the prudishness and repression in the society around them, they don't realise their own grotesquerie. Nor do they appear much interested in gender politics or what it costs some of their women followers to join the movement (we learn almost in passing that a young Indian woman has been disowned by her family because of her association with FFF). You have to admire their proselytising and resourcefulness though – they claim that one in ten of the strangers



Porn to be wild: 'Fuck for Forest'

they approach on the street will agree to participate in their photo and video sessions, and they clearly raise large amounts of money.

The most poignant and painful part of the film comes when they head deep into the Amazon forests. They are hoping to find a world of prelapsarian innocence but are regarded by the villagers they want to help as just more decadent Europeans, out to exploit them. "In Europe you can walk around naked but not here. You are prostituting the children," they are told by the people they have come thousands of miles to help. They are utterly crestfallen. Danny in particular seems an innocent and vulnerable figure – a long-haired troubadour desperate to be liked. Later, we see him telling Palestinian refugees that his fight is similar to theirs, and asking them to join him in his latest naked protest outside the town hall. Understandably, they seem both amused and embarrassed by his sheer naivety. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mikolaj Pokromski
Michal Marczak
Script
Michal Marczak
Lukasz Grudzinski
Cinematography
Michal Marczak
Editing

Dorota
Wardeszkiewicz
Music
Marcin Masecki
Location Sound
Radoslaw Ochnio
Lukasz Grudzinski
©Pokromski Studio/

Michal Marczak/
Kinomat Berlin
Production Companies
Pokromski Studio
presents a Michal
Marczak film
Co-produced by
Kinomat Berlin,

Against Gravity
Funded by Polish
Film Institute,
Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg
A Polish Film
Institute co-financed
production
A Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg
co-funded production
Produced by
Pokromski Studio
and Michal Marczak
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Dogwoof
776t fl +0 frames

Danny is an idealistic young Norwegian who was a horse-riding champion in his youth but has rebelled against his bourgeois background. In Berlin, he becomes part of environmental movement Fuck for Forest, a group of hippy anarchists who post porn videos and photographs online and then invest the profits in ecological projects. Together with Tommy, Leona and Natty, Danny takes part in FFF events and happenings. They tell strangers that they are raising money to "save nature". A surprising number of these strangers are willing to be photographed for the FFF site.

With the money it has raised, FFF has an opportunity to invest in an ecological project in a remote part of the Amazon. FFF members head first to Manaus in Brazil and then on to Colombia,

eventually arriving deep in the rainforest. At first they are welcomed by the isolated and impoverished community they have come to visit. However, when they have a formal meeting with the villagers and announce their plans to give them money to buy their ancestral land, the villagers are suspicious and then hostile. They want to know what FFF is demanding in return for its investment. They also tell their visitors that in their community, nudity is prohibited. Eventually, the FFF group is asked to leave. Crestfallen, the members go their separate ways across South America. After six months, we hear that they returned to Berlin to come up with a new plan for saving the planet. Danny is last seen back home in Norway discussing his plans to protest naked with a group of very sceptical Palestinian refugees.

Gimme the Loot

USA 2012
Director: Adam Leon

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Crashing out of the blocks with an energy it succeeds in maintaining, Adam Leon's brisk debut feature is an enjoyably picaresque tale that has the history of New York-set, youth-centric subcultural cinema woven through it like shot silk but never feels remotely derivative. Set across two days, *Gimme the Loot* evokes the temporal constriction and summer sultriness of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) but perhaps more germanely recalls the fizzing energy and reckless forward momentum of John Cassavetes's *Shadows* (1959), another compassionate, rough-edged debut memorably depicting young outsiders in a state of flux under New York's unforgiving glare. (Incidentally, the first words spoken in *Shadows* are: "Hey, Benny, you got the loot?")

As hinted at by its unambiguous, Notorious B.I.G.-quoting title, *Gimme the Loot* boasts a narrative of urgent directness, tracking the efforts of Malcolm and Sofia – a pair of likeable hardscrabble Bronx teens – to raise enough cash to exact creative revenge on the rival graffiti outfit who defaced their latest masterpiece. While there are illicit, vicarious thrills to be had in the pair's casually offhand criminal activity, these are amusingly offset by the inherent unlikelihood of their mission and the near-bathetic haplessness of their efforts. Leon simply trusts that we'll care enough that Malcolm and Sofia care: it's a gamble that pays off.

Leon shoots with a searching mobility well suited to a panoply of urban locations that reveal the city's endlessly contradictory proximities. His repeated use of lengthy takes filmed with long lenses helps to situate the characters within their wider landscape and give Malcolm and Sofia ample time to bounce off each other when not indulged in smartly cross-cut individual entrepreneurial activity. Leon draws fine performances from newcomers Ty Hickson (puppyish) and Tashiana Washington (world-weary), who share a palpable chemistry and deliver the script's rat-a-tat rally of barbs with relish. Their potential for romantic kindling imbues the film with a further narrative frisson and both characters embody a protean sweetness absent from the surly urban troglodytes that peppered the landscape of Larry Clark's alarmist, if aesthetically comparable, *Kids* (1995).

Despite Malcolm and Sofia's gaucheness, Leon is careful not to patronise them, understanding that their mission isn't quite as inconsequential as it initially seems. Their aim stems as much from a thirst for revenge as from any yearning for visibility and respect (to "go down in history", as Malcolm puts it), the quest for which was documented in early graffiti films like Charlie Ahearn's *Wild Style* (1983) and the landmark *Style Wars* (1983). Both depicted primarily black and Hispanic kids in rundown areas of the city, high on the first flushes of a subculture that prioritised artistic creativity while terrifying parents and authority figures alike. Graffiti – now welcomed into mainstream pop culture – was deemed a 'quality of life offence' by a succession of New York mayors.

This type of desire for agency lies beyond the comprehension of Ginnie (Zoë Lescage), the stoned, bohemian, well-heeled white girl



Making their mark: Tashiana Washington, Ty Hickson

with whom Malcolm becomes infatuated mid-scam. In their first meeting, they share a cross-cultural flirtation, prompting a woozy Malcolm to declare his love for her to a disbelieving Sofia. So it comes as a shock when he is callously and pointedly 'othered' by Ginnie and her coterie of drunk, rich friends later in the narrative ("Say hello to the drug dealer!"). It's a disquieting moment that betrays Leon's awareness of NYC's de facto race and class segregation, and intelligently connects his film to graffiti's sociopolitical roots. Later, an eerily silent rooftop confrontation between Malcolm, Sofia and Ginnie recalls the brilliant moment in Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979) when the exhausted, decimated Coney Island gang board a subway train and trade emotionally charged glances with a group of clean-cut prom kids.

Tying everything together is a resolutely unflashy aesthetic that radiates an analogue

sensibility in spite of being shot digitally; the *mise en scène* is largely parsed of references that might obviously date the film. This retro ideology is further embodied in Sofia's brusque, anti-capitalist dismissal of the Shea Stadium's new name, Citi Field ("I'm not calling it after some stupid bank!"), and a hilarious sequence in which heavily tattooed old-school criminal Champion reacts with spittle-flecked outrage to Malcolm's suggestion that he might google advice on how to pick a newfangled lock. Augmenting the film's curiously timeless feel is a well-chosen soundtrack that eschews predictable hip-hop and 'yoof' fare for a winning combination of vintage soul and R&B.

With supreme confidence and clear vision, Leon has crafted an empathetic, non-judgemental paean to New York City's subcultural history and the dual joys of youth and brevity. He is without question a name to watch. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Natalie Difford
Dominic Buchanan
Jamund Washington
Written by
Adam Leon
Director of Photography
Jonathan Miller
Editor

Morgan Faust
Production Design
Sammy Lisenco
Katie Hickman
Original Music
Nicholas Britell
Sound Mixer
Anthony Thompson
©Seven for Ten, LLC

Production Companies
A Seven for Ten production in association with Flagstone Features, DOT Pictures, Badminton Stamps Films

Cast
Tashiana Washington
Sofia
Ty Hickson
Malcolm
Meeko
Champion
Sam Soghor
Lenny

Adam Metzger
Donnie
Greyson 'Gordo' Cruz
Alfonso
James Harris Jr
Ronaldo
Zoë Lescage
Ginnie
Joshua Rivera
Rico

Melvin Mogoli
Kaps
Leah Hennessey
Hot Mess
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Soda Pictures

The Bronx, New York, present day. Teenaged graffiti artists Malcolm and Sofia have one of their works defaced ('buffed') with the New York Mets logo by rival graffiti crew WKC (from neighbouring Queens) and resolve to take revenge by tagging the iconic Home Run Apple monument at the Mets' Citi Field stadium. To do so they must raise \$500 to pay off stadium security guard Pedro. Malcolm tricks a local drug dealer into giving him five packets of weed, which he delivers to Ginnie, a girl in Manhattan with whom he enjoys a brief flirtation. The dealer's outraged boss arrives, prompting Malcolm to flee, minus his sneakers and sufficient cash. Sofia's attempts to raise money are thwarted; she visits a custom client for payment but emerges

only with a pair of sneakers to sell. Her bike is stolen. She pursues the culprit's friend and steals his phone but is tricked out of pawning it by a convenience-store employee. She sells the sneakers and some stolen spray cans to a friend but is robbed by the waiting WKC crew. Malcolm returns to Ginnie's house in order to seduce her and rob her parents' jewellery box but he fails to get the opportunity. Leaving, Malcolm steals the key to the jewellery box, then conspires with Sofia and local criminal Champion to break into Ginnie's house. The break-in is bungled and they leave with nothing. On the morning of the scheduled break-in, the pair plan to trick Pedro with dollar bills made from paper. However, Pedro fails to show, leaving the pair crestfallen.

The Hardy Bucks Movie

Ireland/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Mike Cockayne

Reviewed by Derek O'Connor

If you're not Irish – don't worry, nobody's perfect – then the rise and rise of Celtic comedic ensemble the Hardy Bucks has more than likely bypassed your cultural radar entirely. On their native shores, however, the Bucks have already enjoyed considerable success as an internet phenomenon, a television sitcom, a live show and now a movie, one underwritten in part by a Hollywood major (Universal) dipping its toe into local waters. This tale of small-town wasters originated as a series of largely improvised mockumentary sketches posted on YouTube, before graduating to national broadcaster RTE via an online knockout competition and two TV series, which attempted (with rather mixed results) to spin the Bucks' brand of short-form observational gold into a half-hour format. Freed of the excessive editorialising that often goes with the television process, this lively and likeable big-screen debut, produced on a relative shoestring, gamely serves to rekindle the spark that put the Bucks on the radar to begin with.

Director/producer/editor Mike Cockayne – a collaborator since the Hardy Bucks' early TV days with creators/stars Martin Maloney and Chris Tordoff (aka head Buck Eddie Durkan and perennial nemesis the Viper) – wrote the script with Gerry Greaney, sticking with a tried-and-trusted scenario often applied to sitcoms-turned-movies: the trip to the Continent. Following in the footsteps of any number of shows, from *Are You Being Served?* to *The Inbetweeners*, they conspire to allow their freewheeling narrative – and the production itself – to piggyback on to the Irish football squad's disastrous 2012 European Championship campaign, landing themselves plenty of free extras, some clearly the worse for wear, in the process.

Thus our bevy of Bucks abandon their perpetually drizzly Mayo hometown for a crazy road trip to the Euro 2012 finals in Poland, by way of hedonistic hijinks in – where else? – Amsterdam and a barely-there caper plot that sees them forced to become drug smugglers en



Continental drift: 'The Hardy Bucks Movie'

route. The designated show stealer – as has been the case throughout every iteration to date – is the Viper, co-creator Tordoff's would-be drug lord, a singularly pathetic and needy soul, abandoned by his useless henchmen and possessed of an innate ability to rub any living organism – particularly the female ones – the wrong way.

Comedically, the Bucks might be viewed as cousins of Kevin Smith's *Clerks* posse by way of Mike Clattenburg's *Trailer Park Boys* – lives going nowhere, days dragging by, doing whatever it takes to keep the tedium at bay. At a time when Ireland's economy remains in the toilet, with emigration at near-famine levels, the Bucks' inarticulate aimlessness feels curiously authentic, their need for escape almost poignant. Almost, we stress; their largely male fanbase will delight in the relentless barrage of lavatorial humour, punctuated by the occasional witty aside.

Considering that the Bucks have made a virtue out of exclusively casting non-actors before now, a third-act appearance here from renowned Andrzej Wajda regular Daniel Olbrychski (whose credits include everything from Kieslowski's *Decalogue* to the Angelina Jolie spy thriller *Salt*) comes as a bit of a shock – Cockayne says he cast Olbrychski as a heavy after googling 'most famous Polish actors'. Like his character, and the movie itself, he's game for revelling shamelessly in that most infamous of Irish commodities – in the end, it's all about the craic. 6

I'm So Excited!

Spain/USA 2013
Director: Pedro Almodóvar

See Feature
on page 36

Reviewed by Carlos Losilla

Ever since *All About My Mother* (1999), and even more markedly so from the start of this century, Pedro Almodóvar's cinema has endeavoured to think

incessantly about itself. It's not so much a matter of a shift from a comic to a dramatic register, but rather a desire to contemplate his own style from a different, more analytical and reflexive point of view. In films such as *Talk to Her* (2002), *Bad Education* (2004), *Broken Embraces* (2009), *The Skin I Live In* (2011) and even the more conciliatory *Volver* (2006), another Almodóvar emerged: darker and more sombre but also more doubtful, more insecure – a condition that has given rise to some of his greatest achievements while also plunging him to some of his lowest moments. This is why to regard *I'm So Excited!* as his return to pure comedy turns out to be impoverishing, a serious mistake that has led to his worst reviews since *Live Flesh* (1997). *I'm So Excited!* may start out as a comedy but the apparent festive feeling soon translates into a melancholic tone – sometimes almost fiercely so – directed as much at the very persona the filmmaker has created for himself as at the surroundings that have allowed this character to flourish, and the country that has harboured him. *I'm So Excited!* is the dark side of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988).

Almodóvar's customary insolent, provoking females are here reincarnated as three gay air stewards trying to entertain first-class passengers on an improbable airplane which has broken down halfway to Mexico and must find a free runway on which to make an emergency landing. (The economy-class passengers, meanwhile, have been drugged into passivity.) Something like a pop psychodrama, hallucinatory and oneiric, *I'm So Excited!* explores various of the passengers' quests for happiness and ends with them removing their masks and giving themselves up to the liberating psychological striptease provoked by their insidious hosts – simultaneously angels and demons, masters of ceremonies and agitators of conscience. Pushed to the foreground is one of Almodóvar's main subjects: representation as a catharsis, theatre as a palliative, fiction as the only reality. The result is a succession of disjointed sketches, a film that lurches hither and thither, as directionless as the plane itself, going forever in circles in an energetic and unpredictable narrative flow which only once ventures outside its enclosed setting to give us what could have been another film: a delicious, sentimental intermezzo halfway between Jacques Becker and Jean Negulesco. The sinuous rhythm of *I'm So Excited!* is not so far removed from other recent genuinely postmodern films such as Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* and Joe Wright's *Anna Karenina*.

What's at stake in all this muddle? On the one hand, the filmmaker, the great Spanish director who has yet to find himself, who is always unsatisfied and searching for new stimuli – but who's also the salesman whose resistance to losing the audience's favour is the reason why he dare not take that final step, which would very likely be a step too far. On the other hand, Spain,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Mike Cockayne

Written by

Mike Cockayne

Gerry Greaney

Director of

Photography

Rob Arrowsmith

Edited by

Rik Spangle

Chris Tordoff

Production Designer

Stephanie Clerkin

Original Music

Sponge

Sound Recordist

Patrick Downey

©Hardy Film Ltd

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

and Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/the Irish

Film Board presents

in association

with RTE a Hardy

Films production

A Mike Cockayne film

Executive Producer

Conor Harrington

Cast

Martin Maloney

Eddie Durkan

Owen Colgan

Buzz McDonall

Chris Tordoff

the Viper

Peter Cassidy

Frenchtoast

Tom Kilgallon

the Boo

Michael Salmon

Mikey Salmon

Tommy Miller

Stateside

Eugene Maloney

Uncle Mick

Wayne Lynch

Dragon

Paddy Moore

Stephen

Eoin O'Connor

doctor

Alison Gormley

Aunt Salmon

Daniel Olbrychski

Roman

In Colour

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

The Irish hamlet of Castletown, the present. The Hardy Bucks are a gang of bored slackers, living an aimless existence and facing the prospect of another rainy and bored summer. When local drug dealer the Viper brags that he's taking a road trip to see the Irish squad compete in the European Football Championships in Poland, the Bucks' leader Eddie Durkan resolves to take the gang to Euro 2012. With a modest inheritance bankrolling their trip, the Bucks take to the road – but by the time they reach the Continent, their decrepit van is a write-off. An unanticipated stop-off in Amsterdam reunites them with the Viper, whose insufferable behaviour has prompted his travel companions to bail out; he offers the Bucks a ride, which they grudgingly accept, antagonising their would-be host at every opportunity. A wild druggy night in an Amsterdam strip club leaves Eddie and fellow Buck Frenchtoast heavily in debt; to pay the money back, they must deliver a large quantity of drugs to a contact in Poland. When they arrive, they mistakenly deliver the package to the wrong person but the day is unwittingly saved by the Viper, who reveals that he had already stolen their drugs and has them safely hidden. Debt repaid, the gang finally enjoy the football.

The Incredible Burt Wonderstone

USA 2013, Director: Don Scardino
Certificate 15 100m 10s

Reviewed by Sanam Maher

The nuts and bolts of some processes are best left unimagined – how sausages are made, for instance. And so it is with *The Incredible Burt Wonderstone*: peek under the magician's cape or discover the secret stash of handkerchiefs up his sleeves and all you're left with is a trickster in a funny hat. *Burt Wonderstone* tells the story of two lonely ten-year-olds brought together by the transformative power of a magic kit. Rance Holloway, creator of the kit, promises that "everyone loves a magician", and so the two boys combine their talents to work out a series of magic tricks.

Fastforward 30 years and the duo, now in their forties and known as Burt Wonderstone (Steve Carell) and Anton Marvelton (Steve Buscemi), are performing nightly at sold-out shows in Las Vegas. They've swapped their braces for big hair and sequined jumpsuits but their routine retains an unsettling juvenile tone – they open their show with the Steve Miller Band's 'Abracadabra' playing ("I wanna reach out and grab ya") as they act out sketches about stealing the school quarterback's girlfriend through magic. The fact that their routine has remained unchanged, down to the simplistic titles of their tricks ('Man Head, Lady Body'), may be a comfort to their audiences but it's a nagging thorn in their friendship, as they're tired of going through the motions hundreds or thousands of times.

While fame has gone to Burt's overly coiffed head – he owns "the biggest bed in Vegas, able to hold two dozen people" – and left him jaded, Anton remains childlike in his appreciation of a good trick and its ability to inspire wonder. When rival magician Steve Gray (Jim Carrey) – a cross between Criss Angel and Derren Brown known as the 'Brain Rapist' – sweeps into town with his shock-and-awe routine, Burt and Anton's audiences start to disappear, as do their financiers. The movie frames Burt and Anton's career choices within a simplistic Hollywood-hued psychoanalytic framework, rooted in their desire for acceptance and love as children – so you can only wonder at the trauma Steve must have experienced, since his act includes holding his urine for a painfully long time, branding his flesh



Tricks of the trade: Steve Carell



In-flight entertainment: Cecilia Roth

viewed with a mixture of attraction and rejection, a culture surrendered to its double vocation, both tragic and unconsciously hedonistic. That plane suspended in mid-air, with the economy class significantly drugged, is Almodóvar's imaginary, as if what's being filmed is the inside of his head, full of archetypes as recognisable as they are evasive, his own creatures of the past seeping between frames – it isn't surprising that those in charge of inaugurating the whole event, in a strange prelude at the airport, are Penélope Cruz and Antonio Banderas. But time has passed, and the country of the *movida* and design has become an abandoned no man's land, misty and spectral, from which the only thing left to do is run away.

It's not just that the characters allude to Spain's current economic crisis but that they

themselves are its victims and executioners: the banker who has laundered his capital building airports that are now inactive; the luxury call girl who's made a fortune thanks to the bigwigs of a system that's now collapsing... Almodóvar sums up this feeling with disturbing takes of an empty airport, its deserted corridors, its motionless conveyor belts. These are the least glamorous images that Almodóvar has ever filmed and also the perfect metonyms for this imperfect, hobbling comedy – one that lacks real spark yet is at the same time moving in its involuntary vulnerability, in its meagre appetite for laughter at the shameful spectacle of a country in ruins: a failed film which, nevertheless, says much more about its author than it would first appear to.

Translated by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Agustín Almodóvar
Produced by
Esther García
Written by
Pedro Almodóvar
Director of Photography
José Luis Alcaine
Editor
José Salcedo
Art Director
Antón Gómez
Music
Alberto Iglesias
Sound
Iván Marín

Costumes
Tatiana Hernández
©El Deseo D.A.S.L.U.
Production Companies
El Deseo presents a film by Pedro Almodóvar
In association with Blue Lake Media Fund, FilmNation Entertainment
With the support of Instituto de Cinematografía y de las Artes

Audiovisuales
With the financial support of Instituto de crédito Oficial
With the participation of TVE and Canal+ España

Cast
Antonio de la Torre
Álex Acero
Hugo Silva
Benito Morón
Miguel Ángel Silvestre
groom

Laya Martí
bride
Javier Cámara
Joserra
Carlos Areces
Fajas
Raúl Arévalo
Ulloa
José María Yazpik
Infante
Guillermo Toledo
Galán
José Luis Torrijo
Más
Lola Dueñas
Bruna

Cecilia Roth
Norma Boss
Blanca Suárez
Ruth
Antonio Banderas
León
Penélope Cruz
Jessica
Carmen Machi
concierge
Paz Vega
Alba

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Pathé Productions

Spanish theatrical title
Los amantes pasajeros

Madrid, the present. A man and a woman, both ground staff at the airport, are distracted from their work as they flirt. Consequently, a plane to Mexico takes off with a major fault – one of the wheels cannot open for landing. On board, before imparting the bad news, three gay air stewards drug everyone in economy class and prepare to entertain the business-class passengers: a virgin clairvoyant, a runaway financier wanted for massive fraud, an actor fleeing a failed love affair, the female dominatrix boss of a high-class prostitution service, a mysterious Mexican hitman, and a young couple on their honeymoon. Head steward Joserra is having an affair with Alex, the bisexual pilot. As they desperately search for an airport where they can make an emergency landing – and as the stewards distribute

plenty of drink and mescaline – the passengers begin to reveal things about themselves. The actor phones a woman he abandoned in Madrid, who is on the verge of jumping off a viaduct. She drops the phone mid-conversation; it is picked up by the actor's estranged previous lover below, thus reconnecting them.

The Mexican hitman has been hired to kill the dominatrix, but they become lovers instead. The clairvoyant loses her virginity to a drugged man asleep in economy class. The financier is reunited by phone with his estranged daughter, whom the dominatrix happens to know.

The plane finally lands safely at Castilla-La Mancha airport; as the passengers head across the runway, they each decide to make big changes to their lives.

and cutting into his face with a razor. While an underused Buscemi disappears for much of the latter half of the film, Carrell and Carrey portion out a litany of trailer-friendly gags and punchlines that would be perfectly at home on an episode of *30 Rock*—no surprise, as director Don Scardino directed and produced five seasons of that NBC show. As Burt and Anton's assistant Jane, Olivia Wilde does a fairly bland turn as a former geek with aspirations to headline her own Vegas show. Meanwhile Alan Arkin breathes comedic life into the character of Rance Holloway, a slightly acerbic old hand who coaxes Burt and Anton to the middle ground, showing them that a performance need not confound or shock audiences, but should simply enthrall them for the time they spend with you. Real magic, the film suggests saccharinely, ultimately lies in our ability to transform ourselves. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Chris Bender Steve Carrell Jake Weiner Tyler Mitchell	©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.	James Gandolfini Doug Munny
Screenplay Jonathan Goldstein John Francis Daley	Production Companies New Line Cinema presents a Benderspink/ Carousel production	Alan Arkin Rance Holloway
Story Chad Kultgen Tyler Mitchell Jonathan Goldstein John Francis Daley	Executive Producers Diana Pokorny Vance DeGeneres Charlie Hartsock J.C. Spink	Jay Mohr Rick the Implausible
Director of Photography Matthew Clark	Producers Richard Brener Walter Hamada Dave Neustadter	Michael Bully Herbig Lucius Belvedere
Edited by Lee Haxall	Cast Steve Carrell Burt Wonderstone Steve Buscemi Anton Marvelton Olivia Wilde Jane Jim Carrey Steve Gray	Mason Cook young Burt Luke Vanek young Anton
Production Designer Keith Cunningham		Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]
Music Lyle Workman		Distributor Warner Bros Distributors (UK)
Sound Mixer Ben Patrick		9,015 ft +0 frames
Costumes Designed by Dayna Pink		

US, the 1980s. A boy, Burt, is given a magic kit for his tenth birthday. Practising a trick at school one day, he strikes up a friendship with fellow loner Anton, and the two create their own tricks. Thirty years later, they perform at sold-out shows in Las Vegas as Burt Wonderstone and Anton Marvelton. When their sexually harassed assistant quits, Burt recruits a stagehand, Jane, to replace her.

Rival illusionist Steve Gray introduces a new brand of shock-entertainment that wows audiences, and soon Burt and Anton's ticket sales dwindle. In an attempt to recapture their audience's attention, the two plan a trick that involves sealing themselves in a glass box for a week, suspended above a public square in Vegas. The trick goes awry as Burt's hysterical claustrophobia causes the box to crash to the ground. Burt and Anton end their partnership. Jane, frustrated at Burt's selfishness, quits. To make ends meet, Burt performs in supermarkets and retirement homes, where he runs into Rance Holloway, the creator of the magic kit he received as a boy. Rance encourages Burt to rediscover his love for magic and to make peace with Jane and Anton. Jane and Burt fall in love; with Anton and Rance they work to compete for a headlining act in Vegas. Burt and Anton beat Steve by performing an elaborate magic trick that causes their audience to disappear and reappear at another location (the trick involves drugging the audience). Burt, Anton and Jane are given their own shows.

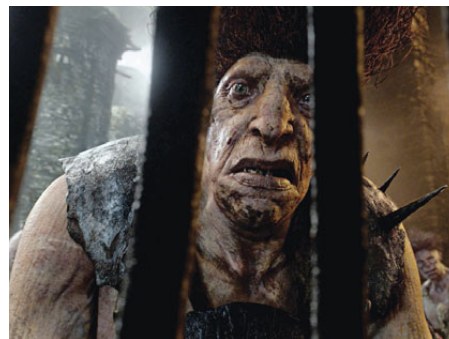
Jack the Giant Slayer

USA 2013
Director: Bryan Singer
Certificate 12A 113m 58s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Arguably *Shrek* (2001) set the ball rolling with its anything-goes pastiche of familiar fairytale motifs and a few subsequent live-action features – notably Terry Gilliam's *The Brothers Grimm* (2005) and Tommy Wirkola's *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013) – have retained the unjolly green giant's wildly postmodern way with classic bedtime stories. Yet other recent revisions of children's tales, be it the recycled *contes de Red Riding Hood* (2011), *Mirror Mirror* (2012) and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) or the updated treatments of local folklore in Norwegian films *Troll Hunter* (2010) and *Thale* (2012), have focused less on deconstructive play than on telling old stories in newer idioms. Similarly Bryan Singer's *Jack the Giant Slayer*, though co-written by Darren Lemke (who helped pen 2010's *Shrek Forever After*) and though referencing, through a cameo from a ginger cat, the 2011 *Shrek* spinoff *Puss in Boots* (which also ploughed the beanstalk plot), never quite goes full *Shrek*.

This is not for want of intertextuality. The modest house of farm boy Jack (Nicholas Hoult) is swept up into the air as though the sprouting beanstalk were the tornado from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939); in his self-serving motivations, his giant-exploiting plot and his willingness to abandon the princess to whom he is betrothed, Stanley Tucci's villain Roderick is plainly modelled on Prince Humperdinck from *The Princess Bride* (1987); the cliffs and waterfalls of the giants' land Gantua evoke the verticality of the floating islands in *Avatar* (2009); and having Ewan McGregor's knight Elmont say "I'm getting an awfully bad feeling about this" suggests that perhaps the galaxy of the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (in which McGregor's Jedi knight Obi-Wan Kenobi repeatedly utters a similar line)



Monsters, inc: 'Jack the Giant Slayer'

may not after all be so very far, far away from Jack's fictional hamlet of Cloister in medieval Albion. Yet all these allusions to pre-existing silver-screen adventures serve less to mark *Jack the Giant Slayer* as a postmodern exercise in mix and match than to place it in a tradition of old-fashioned matinee entertainment – which is exactly what Singer's fairytale delivers.

There may be towering plants and outsized savages, but the film's ambitions are decidedly modest, apart from the vividly spectacular presentation of its moccaped monsters engaged in climactic gigantomachy. Princess Isabelle (Eleanor Tomlinson) may at first seem a new kind of fairytale heroine, independent of spirit and champing at the bit to escape the constraints placed upon her by the overprotective patriarchy of widowed King Brahmwell (Ian McShane), but it isn't long before she has reverted to the status of archetypal woman-in-peril. Meanwhile, the beanstalk itself becomes a symbol not only of growing up but also of social elevation, as 18-year-old Jack rises above his roots to pursue a princess's hand. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Neal H. Moritz David Dobkin Ori Marmor Bryan Singer Patrick McCormick	Stunt Co-ordinator Steve Dent	Eddie Marsan Crawe Ewen Bremner Wicke Ian McShane King Brahmwell
Screenplay Darren Lemke Christopher McQuarrie Dan Studney	©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Legendary Pictures Funding, LLC	Christopher Fairbank uncle Simon Lowe monk Mingus Johnston Bald
Story Darren Lemke David Dobkin	Production Companies New Line Cinema presents in association with Legendary Pictures an Original Film/Big Kid Pictures/Bad Hat Harry production A Bryan Singer film	Ralph Brown General Entin Bill Nighy General Fallon
Director of Photography Newton Thomas Sigel	Executive Producers Thomas Tull Jon Jashni Alex Garcia Toby Emmerich Richard Brener Michael Disco John Rickard	Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]
Editors John Ottman Bob Ducsay		Some screenings presented in 3D
Production Designer Gavin Bocquet		Distributor Warner Bros Distributors UK
Music John Ottman		10,257 ft +0 frames
Production Sound Mixer Peter Lindsay		
Costume Designer Joanna Johnston	Cast Nicholas Hoult Jack Eleanor Tomlinson Princess Isabelle Ewan McGregor Elmont Stanley Tucci Roderick	
Visual Effects Digital Domain MPC Soho VFX Rodeo FX Tata Elxsi Ltd (VCL) Hatch FX Gener8		

Cloister, Albion, once upon a time. The boy Jack has been reared on bedtime stories of man-eating giants banished to the aerial kingdom of Gantua by old King Erik's magic crown, which gives its holder power over the monsters. Ten years later, power-hungry Roderick has secretly unearthed both the crown and the magic beans that create a beanstalk gateway to Gantua – but a monk steals the beans and hands them to Jack. Unhappily betrothed to Roderick by King Brahmwell, adventurous Princess Isabelle seeks shelter from the rain at Jack's farmhouse, only to be swept into the sky by a towering beanstalk sprouted from a moistened seed.

Jack and Roderick join loyal knight Elmont's rescue party. On Gantua, Roderick seizes all but one of the remaining beans from Jack. Everyone except Jack is captured by the giants, but Roderick takes command of the giants with the crown and announces his intention to lead them against Albion. Jack frees Isabelle and Elmont, and Elmont fights and kills Roderick. The three only just make it down the beanstalk before it is uprooted by Brahmwell's men below – but two-headed giant Fallon, wearing the crown as a ring, leads his giant army to earth down beanstalks sprouted from Roderick's beans. The giants besiege Cloister, but Jack throws the last bean (fatally) into Fallon's mouth, stops the giants' onslaught with the crown, and marries Isabelle.

London, present day. The crown, on display in the Tower of London, is eyed by a schoolboy who resembles Roderick.

King of the Travellers

Ireland 2012
Director: Mark O'Connor
Certificate 15 79m 49s

Reviewed by Derek O'Connor

The travails of the Irish travelling community warrant honest examination now more than ever, thanks in no small part to the perfect media storm generated by a series of real-life dramas (most notably the dramatic 2011 siege at the UK's largest traveller halting site, at Dale Farm in Essex) coupled with the success of offensive 'reality' TV series *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, a sneering grotesquerie designed to reinforce every imaginable negative stereotype of the traveller lifestyle for audiences' delectation. A balanced presentation of contemporary traveller life (and travellers' status, or lack thereof, in modern society) is badly overdue, with cinema offering occasional redress, as the age-old portrait of the magical Oirish tinker has given way to relatively nuanced exploration across a broad variety of genres. Noteworthy efforts include Mike Newell's kids' fantasy *Into The West* (1992) and Gilles McKinnon's under-appreciated conman drama *Trojan Eddie* (1996), not to mention Perry Ogden's remarkable portrait of a young traveller girl, *Pavee Lackeen* (2005), with a tip of the hat to Brad Pitt's gleefully incomprehensible brawler in Guy Richie's wanton geezer-fest *Snatch* (2000). More recently, Ian Palmer's fascinating documentary portrait *Knuckle* (2012) offered a compelling portrait of the elaborate, borderline farcical disputes between traveller families, with the antagonists goading each other to action via a series of chest-beating, insult-laden DIY video diatribes.

The narrative of *King of the Travellers* pivots around one such feud: the seismic fallout between two traveller families, the Moorehouses and the Powers, dating back to the mysterious assassination of Moorehouse family paterfamilias Black Martin a decade hence and brought to a head when both clans set up camp in the Dublin hinterlands. Cloaked in Shakespearean tropes and liberally dosed with Corleone family values, writer-director

Mark O'Connor's ambitious tale actively touches on any number of real-life hotspots – from the casual racism experienced on a daily basis by travellers to the domestic abuse suffered by traveller women – while delivering a lean, moody revenge flick that (at a brisk 80 minutes) doesn't outstay its welcome.

O'Connor made one of the more promising Irish debuts in recent years with *Between the Canals*, a no-budget Northside Dublin riff on *Mean Streets* with swagger to burn and a refreshingly authentic feel for character and milieu, frequently utilising non-professional actors to winning effect. He plays to the same strengths here, deftly raising his game cinematically (a thunderous opening sequence offers a pony-trap race on a busy Dublin motorway) while simultaneously falling somewhat short in the script department. It's to his considerable credit that the world he evokes transcends any number of well-worn (to say the least) narrative clichés.

The intention, successfully realised, is to offer an honest portrayal of Irish traveller living – O'Connor developed the project with veteran actor Michael Collins, himself from proud traveller stock, who gives a commanding performance as the compromised scion of the fractured Moorehouse clan. As reprisals and revelations come thick and fast, what truly engages is the natural charisma that unlikely leading man John Connors brings to the often thankless role of stocky antihero John Paul. Saddled with a sub-Stanley Kowalski motivation (he literally could have been a contender) and a penchant for quoting Oscar Wilde, Connors transcends his occasionally lumpy dialogue by sheer force of physical presence alone, giving his character the genuine pathos the film needs. Its talented creator doesn't quite pull off the epic tragedy he's clearly shooting for, but comes tantalisingly close enough to warrant further attention next time out. 

The Look of Love

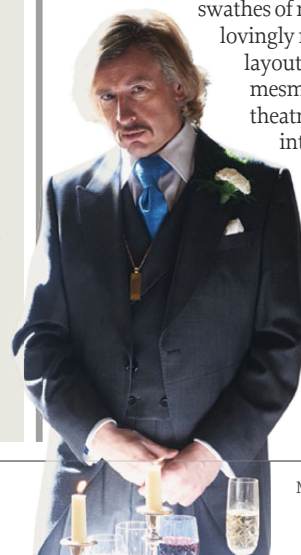
United Kingdom/Luxembourg 2013
Director: Michael Winterbottom
Certificate 18 100m 59s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's very obviously a modern Midas fable. Paul Raymond turned a small fortune from porn into a very large fortune via the Central London property market but in the process lost his beloved daughter to a drugs overdose – a victim of the hedonistic lifestyle he embraced to the full. The subject appears ripe with dramatic potential, yet also perhaps heavy with implicit wages-of-sin disapproval: where else are filmmakers to go with the material? The prolific Michael Winterbottom and his screenwriter Matt Greenhalgh struggle to answer that question, as this much talked-about homegrown biopic proves so wiltingly bland in the telling, offering a bustling skim through the facts without ever really breaching the emotional heartland of its errant protagonist.

Leading man Steve Coogan precipitated the project, and apparently had his Raymond impression already honed by the first meeting, yet somehow the end result lacks the sense of purpose – and indeed the sheer larkiness – that he and Winterbottom brought to their previous feature projects *24 Hour Party People* (2002) and *A Cock & Bull Story* (2005). That said, some credit is due to Coogan for not sugar-coating his portrayal of the nightclub-owner, porn-magazine publisher and property magnate once named 'Britain's richest man', who remains single-mindedly self-contained and blankly unknowable on screen. Coogan doesn't try to get laughs out of Raymond's cringe-making schoolboy sense of humour or his penchant for impressing female company with odd factlets of general knowledge (all this and an epic combover remind us of Coogan's best-known small-screen comedic creation, the awful local radio 'personality' Alan Partridge), instead showing us a man focused wholly on achieving and sustaining a James Bond-style existence of endless female conquests, Grande Marque champagne and a gadget-packed penthouse. In the process we can't help but note the bitter irony that, having turned his entire life into the lurid fantasy he lucratively peddled to the working-class readers of his softcore mags, it ultimately proved his undoing by taking his daughter Debbie away from him, her fragile psychology deeply unsuited to its tawdry environs.

This single insight is never enough to sustain an entire movie, however, not least because the filmmakers' overall attitude remains ill defined, offering little indication of why they should be telling us this story now. Notwithstanding swathes of retro graphics, lovingly recreated magazine layouts and some mesmerisingly grim 70s theatrical tat, what's the intent behind the art direction? 



Sex and the city:
Steve Coogan

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Cormac Fox
Written by
Mark O'Connor
Story
Mark O'Connor
Michael Collins
Director of Photography
Dave Grennan
Editor
John Murphy
Production Designer
Padraig O'Neill
Composer
John Reynolds

Sound Mixer
Dave Dorgan
Costume Designer
Joan O'Clery

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Stalker Films
Production Companies
Vico Films/Stalker
Films/Black Sheep
Productions
With the support of
the Broadcasting
Authority of Ireland
In association with

Bord Scannán na
hÉireann/Irish
Film Board
A film by Mark
O'Connor
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives provided
by the Government
of Ireland
Made in association
with TV3
Produced with the
assistance of Bord
Scannán na hÉireann/
Irish Film Board

Executive Producer
John Wallace

Cast
Michael Collins
Francis Moorehouse
Peter Coonan
Mickey 'The Bags'
Moorehouse
John Connors
John Paul
Moorehouse
Carla McGlynn
Winnie Power
Packy Lee

Eamon Moorehouse
Thomas Collins
Kylie Moorehouse
Mick Foran
Mick Lafferty
Stephen Clinch
Scully
Frank Melia
Tom Dunne
Stephen Jones
Noel Conroy
David Murray
Black Martin
Moorehouse
James Collins
James Moorehouse

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

7,183 ft +8 frames

Traveller John Paul Moorehouse is haunted by the childhood memory of his father, Black Martin, murdered before his eyes by a masked assassin after he'd triumphed over a rival family, the Powers. In the years since, John Paul's uncle Francis has taken his brother's place at the head of the family, keeping a tight rein on John Paul's adopted brother, loose cannon Mickey the Bags. When the Powers challenge John Paul to a bare-knuckle bout, he defeats their champion, attracting the attentions of childhood friend Winnie Power. John Paul experiences a drug-induced vision of

his father demanding revenge for his murder. He finds Winnie and arranges a clandestine meeting for the following day, when the two profess love for each other. Mickey attracts the ire of local landowner Lafferty and his thugs; following a bout with the Powers, Mickey is murdered at a local fair. When John Paul seeks revenge, the Powers deny responsibility; the trail leads to Francis, who confesses to murdering John Paul's father to protect the family's honour. John Paul drowns Francis, only to be shot by Lafferty while stealing a horse from his estate. He dies in Winnie's arms.

➔ To poke fun at Raymond's gaudy attempts at sophistication? To celebrate his absence of hypocrisy when it came to public displays of flesh? Or simply to provide a detailed context for his apparent inability to cultivate emotional connections? Even as a flashback framework opens with the broken old man himself trying to make sense of it all, Winterbottom is too busy breezing through the biography, using the repeated device of faux newsreels, radio and TV docs to deliver an outsider's view on the Raymond phenomenon. It's the insider's view we want, but between myriad music cues and fidgety montages we never get it. Was sheer caution the central issue here, or some well-meaning inclination not to strong-arm the audience? Either way, it comes across like a yawning absence of creative vision. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Melissa Parmenter

Written by

Matt Greenhalgh

Based on biographical material from *Members Only: The Life and Times of Paul Raymond*

by Paul Willetts

Director of Photography

Hubert Taczanowski

Editor

Mags Arnold

Production Designer

Jacqueline Abrahams

Music

Antony Genn

Martin Slattery

Sound Recordist

Will Whale

Costume Designer

Stephanie Collier

©Studiocanal Limited/Channel Four Television

Production Companies

Studiocanal and Film4 present in association with

Anton Capital Entertainment, S.C.A. and LipSync

Productions a Revolution Films production in association with

Baby Cow Films

Executive Producers

Andrew Eaton

Jenny Borgars

Katherine Butler

Norman Merry

Danny Perkins

Piers Wenger

Cast

Steve Coogan

Paul Raymond

Anna Friel

Jean Raymond

Imogen Poots

Debbie Raymond

Tamsin Egerton

Amber St George

'Fiona Richmond'

Chris Addison

Tony Power

James Lance

Carl Snitcher

Matthew Beard

Howard Raymond

Liam Boyle

Derry

Simon Bird

Jonathan Hodge

Matt Lucas

matron behind bars

David Williams

Reverend

Edwyn Young

Dolby Digital In Colour and Black and White

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

9,088 ft +8 frames

London, 1992. Porn and property magnate Paul Raymond is distraught at the death of his daughter Debbie in her mid-thirties. He watches a TV programme in which they were both interviewed, and begins to reflect on his life.

In the early 1960s, Raymond made a name for himself on the provincial variety circuit, adding bodystocking ladies to an otherwise standard circus show. His wife, model Jean, sues the newspapers for claiming that she was nude, and although she loses the case Raymond exploits the publicity to launch his new London strip club, The Raymond Revue Bar. Its success funds Raymond's playboy lifestyle, which causes a rift with Jean but also allows him to begin buying up properties in the club's Soho vicinity. Moving into theatrical revues in the 1970s, he falls for his leading lady, Amber St George, effectively ending his marriage, and creates a key role for her as model and reporter 'Fiona Richmond' in his new top-shelf magazine 'Men Only'. In an atmosphere of coke-fuelled hedonism, his relationship with Amber runs its course, and Raymond's daughter Debbie becomes the focus of his attention. His decision to build a musical revue around her backfires since she lacks star quality but cancelling the show destroys her self-confidence and leads her into substance abuse, beginning a downward spiral that ends in a fatal overdose. Dubbed 'Britain's richest man', Raymond retires from the spotlight, taking some comfort from the property portfolio he'll leave to his granddaughters.

Love Is All You Need

Denmark/Italy/France/Germany/Sweden/Japan/Norway 2012

Director: Susanne Bier

Certificate 15 116m 3s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Susanne Bier, who made her name outside Denmark with thoughtful, downbeat family melodramas like *Brothers* (2004) and *After the Wedding* (2006), shifts into a brighter, more playful mode with this delicately comic midlife romance. It's a frothier lite-Bier, and for those fond of her more bitter brews such as the Oscar-winning *In a Better World* (2010), it takes some getting used to. In place of principled men in full-blown crisis, there's Pierce Brosnan's pompous widower Philip gently getting together with Trine Dyrholm's sweet-natured cancer survivor Ida in Sorrento locations so lush they resemble a timeshare brochure.

However, Bier and her longtime screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen haven't shucked off their interest in exploring life's cataclysms. Here they examine parents and adult children rising to the challenge of making new lives after illness, infidelity, bereavement and coming-out, but use humour rather than conflict. What gets left behind in the shift from melodrama to romantic comedy is Bier's usual chewy characterisation and moral dilemmas. In their place, we get pleasant, unnuanced participants in a perky if meandering progression from Ida's betrayal by husband Leif to her *Avanti!*-style odd-couple romance with Philip during their respective children's wedding weekend.

Accompanied by Dean Martin warbling 'That's Amore' on the soundtrack, we find ourselves in that small subgenre you could describe as the Mediterranean middle-aged romcom. Previous examples include *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003), *A Month by the Lake* (1995) and even *Shirley Valentine* (1989) – films in which strong sunlight, stunning landscapes and unlikely love affairs forge new lives for mature women. The most famous example is *Mamma Mia!* (2008), whose picturesque wedding-party antics and double romances for parent and child are strongly echoed in *Love Is All You Need*, along with the presence

of Brosnan. Deprived of any witty dialogue – *The Matador* (2005) and *Married Love* (2007) revealed that he's a pleasing light comedian but that's never visible here – Brosnan coasts along on prickly, repressed-English reactions to events.

Although Brosnan can't work any laughs out of the film's patchy mix of photogenic family dysfunction and outbursts of farce, Dyrholm's easygoing Ida elicits a few when whipsawed by confusion after walking in on her husband's lunch-hour adultery, or being discovered wigless while skinny-dipping. This is a movie that shapes its women best, leaving men as courtly or churlish ciphers (Kim Bodnia, familiar to UK TV audiences from *The Bridge*, is particularly poorly served as the boorish Leif). But newcomer Molly Blixt Egelind's pleasingly thin-skinned portrayal of daughter Astrid is nimble enough to show her rubbed increasingly raw at the realisation that her relationship is built on wishful thinking. Too bad, then, that she's in the film's filler subplot, whose predictable plot speed-bumps (pre-wedding nerves, loud hints at her fiancé's gay flirtations) do little more than stretch out the running time, along with DP Morten Søborg's ravishing Italian panoramas.

Bier's attempt to combine romance, family drama and gentle, unforced comedy is ultimately rather more admirable than it is enjoyable. Too glossy and conventional to mobilise the kind of kooky humour that Lynn Shelton employed in *Your Sister's Sister* (2011) with similar ingredients, the film simply isn't funny enough to make everything gel. Trailing through the social embarrassments of the imploding wedding party, one longs ignobly for the sharp, slick barbs of an Ephron or a Nancy Meyers movie. You even get a couple, courtesy of Paprika Steen's bitchy sister-in-law Benedikte ("God, her father looks like a Lucian Freud painting"). Romantic chemistry between the two life-battered leads may be sweet enough but, as it turns out, love isn't all you need to get a romantic comedy to take wing. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Vibeke Windeløv

Sisse Graum

Jørgensen

Screenplay

Anders Thomas Jensen

Story

Susanne Bier

Anders Thomas Jensen

Director of Photography

Morten Søborg

Editors

Pernille Bech

Christensen

Morten Egholm

Production Designer

Peter Grant

Composer

Johan Söderqvist

Sound Design

Eddie Simonsen

Anne Jensen

Costume Design

Signe Sejlund

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Entertainments29

ApS., Lumière

& Co., Slot

Machine, Zentropa

International

France, Arte France

Cinéma, Zentropa

Entertainments

Berlin and Zentropa

International Sweden

Production Companies

Zentropa

Entertainments29

presents in

co-production with

Lumière & Co., Slot

Machine, Zentropa

International

Sweden, DR, Sveriges

Television, Arte

Cinéma, Zentropa

Network Movie, ZDF/

Arte, Longridge

Supported by the

Danish Film Institute

under the 60/40

scheme, Svenska

Filminstitutet,

Eurimages, Nordisk

Film & TV Fond,

Canal+, Ciné+,

Italian Ministry of

Culture, Rai Cinema

Produced by Zentropa

Entertainments29

ApS

With the support

of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union

In collaboration with

Film Commission

Regione Campania

Executive Producers

Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Peter Garde

Cast

Pierce Brosnan

Philip

Trine Dyrholm

Ida

Sebastian Jensen

Patrick

Molly Blixt Egelind

Astrid

Paprika Steen

Benedikte

Kim Bodnia

Leif

Christiane

Schaumburg-Müller

Tilde

Micky Skeel Hansen

Kenneth

Ciro Petrone

Alessandro

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Arrow Film

Distributors Ltd

10,444 ft +8 frames

Danish theatrical title

Den skaldede frisør

Copenhagen, present day. Hairdresser Ida, newly recovered from breast cancer, catches her husband Leif cheating with his employee Tilde. At the airport, leaving for daughter Astrid's Italian wedding, she bumps cars with the groom's widower father Philip, taking a dislike to him. In Italy, Astrid has doubts about her wedding; her fiancé Patrick is attracted to contractor Alessandro. Philip's brash sister-in-law Benedikte repeatedly tries to seduce him but is rebuffed. Philip and Ida become warily friendly, then are attracted to one another. Ida

finds a lump in her neck. During a disastrous wedding-eve party, Patrick secretly kisses Alessandro, and Tilde flirts with Leif's son Kenneth. The next morning, Astrid and Patrick call off their wedding at the altar.

Back in Denmark, Leif begs Ida's forgiveness and Philip asks her to come to Italy with him. Ida rebuffs them both. She has a biopsy and later goes to Philip's Italian property, where they open the hospital letter together. He says that he will love her whatever the outcome. It's good news.

Michael H. Profession: Director

Austria/France/Germany/Switzerland 2013

Director: Yves Montmayeur

Certificate 18 92m 20s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Yves Montmayeur's profile of Michael Haneke begins with a searing non-image of terror ripped from the Austrian director's 1992 film *Benny's Video*. Offscreen, but all too audible, a teenage girl bellows in pain as she is murdered with a boltgun. Onscreen, all we see is a video monitor, on which the eponymous tape runs. This is Benny's video but also Haneke's film, as a segue to an unblinking black eye framed by square glass reminds us.

The next shot offers a rather more pleasant surprise as we cut to the notoriously private Haneke apparently going about his bedtime routine – brushing his teeth, washing his face. But taking a cue from the master of 'contradictory realities', Montmayeur flips the image on its head, as Haneke wanders out into the hallway and on to, we realise, the set of *Amour*, where he is re-enacting a key scene. We're jerked away again as the white lines of a rewind scuttle across the screen and the camera pans out to reveal Haneke watching this footage on another screen in postproduction. Just like that, Montmayeur condenses some 25 years of cinematic manipulation into ten minutes. It's a neat, self-effacing opening to a film that places Haneke's professional successes centre stage, and pays tribute to its subject in form as well as content.

One begins early on to suspect that Montmayeur's focus on the films is born of necessity rather than choice. From the off, Haneke gives the filmmaker the runaround, berating



Director's cut: Riva, Haneke, Trintignant

him for asking "wrong questions" and snorting with mirth at the alternatives. "I'm just trying to find a starting point," Montmayeur groans, capturing the familiar frustration of interviewers faced with Haneke's steadfast refusal of self-interpretation. What then to make of Haneke's later admissions that various elements in his oeuvre are drawn from personal memory; that *The White Ribbon* (2009) is filmed in monochrome because Haneke "remembers in black-and-white"; or that he shares the great privilege of all artists of being able to "deal with all my fears and anxieties in my work"? Is this a slip of the oh-so-solemn mask, or another of the funny games Haneke likes to play with his public?

The portrait the film paints of the man at work does little way to resolve the enigma. Wiry and wired, Haneke scoots around sets, staging scenes for his actors and throwing himself into the air and on to the floor with abandon. He plays air guitar with the younger cast members of *The White Ribbon* (2009) and makes bunny ears behind the heads of his actors at Cannes photo shoots. But as *Amour* star Jean-Louis Trintignant puts it, though they say you'll have fun on a Haneke shoot, it's "Haneke who has fun. You don't. Everyone knows he's not a guy you screw around with." Soon enough we see him short-tempered and seething on the set of *Code Unknown* (2000).

Haneke admits that he's something of an autocrat, citing Lenin's maxim that "trust is good, control is better." One wonders whether his dominion extends to the documentary itself, especially given the Stalinesque purging of the US remake of *Funny Games* from *Michael H's* reverse narrative (its absence is all the more glaring given Haneke's comment about the risible offers he's had from Hollywood). How refreshing it would have been to hear a little self-critique rather than the usual soundbites about craftsmanship and respect for the spectator. Montmayeur doesn't indicate when these interviews took place but some of Haneke's statements makes here have long been in circulation.

Post-Oscars and mock-Twitter feed, Haneke's persona is the quintessential arthouse director as cliché, and the film captures this with a lovely lightness of touch while staying on the sober side of parody. Fans will enjoy it greatly. But as an exposé of oddball directorial obsessiveness it lacks the wildness of, say, *Lost in La Mancha* (2002). Maybe Montmayeur needed to seize a little more control; maybe Haneke to cede a little. 

Oz the Great and Powerful

USA 2013

Director: Sam Raimi

Certificate PG 130m 20s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!" demands Frank Morgan in 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*. This fussy little man has been caught operating a contraption that allows him to scare up a terrible, fiery tintinnabulation as the Great and Powerful Oz. Once outed as "a humbug", the wizard must confess that he's really just "an old Kansas man... Premier balloonist par excellence to the Miracle Wonderland Carnival Company".

Pulling back the curtain on Morgan's life during his days on the carny circuit, Sam Raimi's *Oz the Great and Powerful* is a prequel to the best-loved of the myriad films set in L. Frank Baum's World of Oz. David Lindsay-Abaire and Mitchell Kapner's script follows the process by which a feckless young Oscar 'Oz' Diggs, a fairground huckster, came to be the Wizard of Oz. James Franco, who appeared in Raimi's *Spider-Man* films, stars, and it's immediately evident that this casting is an insuperable error. Where the part requires the unctuous charm, sleight of hand and dexterous tongue of a step-right-up snake-oil salesman, Franco mostly resorts to boom, bluster and that huge, clenched smile, betraying an uneasiness that no natural-born bullshitter can afford. The performance requires two levels – the salesman's bluff on top, the implication of exhaustion beneath – but Franco doesn't even get the superficial part down. His elocution on highfalutin', wow-the-yokels words like "prestidigitation" (a favourite of W.C. Fields's) rings as false as his spriggish goatee for the Midwest of 1905, and the movie never recovers from the wrong-footedness of the first impression its star makes.

The 1939 *Wizard* was made in an America not too far from the world of turn-of-the-century ballyhoo that Baum was drawing on – in fact, with the casting of vaudevillians Ray Bolger, Jack Haley and Bert Lahr, it is something like the ultimate incarnation of that theatrical tradition. And Raimi knows a thing or two about showmanship: after a prologue in Academy-ratio black-and-white, he puts his own spin on *Wizard*'s famous Technicolor reveal, flinging open the wings of the picture to expand to widescreen and colour.

Courtesy of Sony Pictures Imageworks, which provided the *Spider-Man* effects, this digital 3D *Oz* is a thing beyond the reckoning of Louis B. Mayer, as candy-coated – albeit in a very different way – as the universe of Franco's other new release, *Spring Breakers*. But CG sucrose does not a classic make. The 1939 *Wizard* is 101 minutes long and, with the possible exception of 'If I Were King of the Forest', I would not see fit to remove a single minute. The same cannot be said of *Oz the Great and Powerful*, which is nearly half an hour longer despite having no musical numbers. None, that is, save one begun by the Munchkins before being cut off in a nudge-nudge joke. It's unclear why Raimi felt the need to be so cheeky about musicals here when *Spider-Man 3* made evident his own thwarted ambitions in the genre. If nothing else, this film gives Raimi the opportunity to rework material from *Army of Darkness*, the 1992 capstone of his *Evil Dead* trilogy, whose narrative arc *Oz* closely follows: reluctant hero falls from the sky into a faraway land, as per prophecy, irresponsibly sweet-talks local 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Vincent Lucassen
Ebba Sinnzinger
Serge Guez

Cinematographers

Yves Montmayeur
Attila Boa

Editor

Oliver Neumann
Hjalte Bager-
Jonathansson

@Wildart Film,
Crescendo Films, Les
Films du Losange

Production Companies

A film by Yves
Montmayeur
A co-production
of Wildart Film,
Crescendo Films, Les
Films du Losange
With the support
of Fernsehfonds
Austria, MEDIA
Programme of
the European
Union, CNC, Film
Fonds Wien
In co-operation
with Bayerischer
Rundfunk, Ciné+,
Österreichischer
Rundfunk, Schweizer

Radio und Fernsehen

Film Extracts

Amour (2012)
Das weisse Band
*Eine deutsche
Kindergeschichte/*
The White Ribbon
(2009)
Caché/Hidden
(2004)
*Le Temps du
loup/Time of the
Wolf* (2003)
Die Klavierspielerin
/The Piano
Teacher (2001)
*Code inconnu. Récit
incomplet de divers
voyages/Code*
Unknown (2000)
Funny Games (1997)
*71 Fragmente
einer Chronologie
des Zufalls/ 71*
Fragments of a
Chronology of
Chance (1994)
Benny's Video (1992)
Der siebente
Kontinent/
The Seventh
Continent (1989)
The Making of
Amour (2012)
The Making of The
White Ribbon (2009)

The Making of
Hidden (2004)
The Making of Code
Unknown (2000)
The Making of
71 Fragments of
a Chronology of
Chance (1994)

With

Michael Haneke
Jean-Louis
Trintignant
Emmanuelle Riva
Josef Bierbichler
Emily Cox
Susanne Lothar
Béatrice Dalle
Isabelle Huppert
Juliette Binoche

In Colour

Subtitles

Distributor
Artificial Eye
Film Company

8,310 ft +0 frames

Austrian
theatrical title
Michael Haneke
Portrait eines
Film-handwerkers

A documentary profile of director Michael Haneke, focusing on his feature work. Opening with footage from his 1992 feature 'Benny's Video', the film then tracks back from 2012's 'Amour' to his 1989 debut feature 'The Seventh Continent'. Interviews with Haneke and with actors including Susanne Lothar, Emmanuelle Riva, Juliette Binoche and Isabelle Huppert paint a portrait of a jovial but demanding director, enthusiastic and obsessive by turns.

ladies and finally uses his otherworldly knowhow to defeat the forces of evil.

The most welcome of the additions to this *Oz* is a character called the China Girl, who appeared alongside the Scarecrow and the Lion in Baum's 1900 *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* but only now appears to be having her big-screen debut. The character is voiced by Joey King and Franco does his most unaffected acting of the movie in his tender scenes opposite this virtual co-star. On the flesh-and-blood side, Rachel Weisz and Mila Kunis do fine work as sister witches Evanora and Theodora – Evanora knows she's wicked but Theodora, who allows herself to be sweet-talked by Oscar, doesn't. It's a perverse pleasure to watch Evanora fan the flames of jealousy until scorching tears roll down her sister's cheeks, presaging an aversion to water. Despite such bright spots, this *Oz* is the product of a 21st-century Dream Factory where everything is possible, but very little is magical. What a world, what a world! **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joe Roth
Screenplay
Mitchell Kapner
David Lindsay-Abaire
Screen Story
Mitchell Kapner
Based on the works of L. Frank Baum
Director of Photography
Peter Deming
Film Editor
Bob Murawski
Production Designer
Robert Stromberg
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Mixer
Petur Hliddal
Costume Designers
Gary Jones
Michael Kutsche
Visual Effects and Animation
Sony Pictures Imageworks Inc.
luma pictures
Digiscope
Evi Eye Pictures

Method Studios

©Disney Enterprises, Inc.
Production Companies
Disney presents a Roth Films production in association with Curtis-Donen Productions
Executive Producers
Grant Curtis
Palak Patel
Josh Donen
Philip Steuer

Cast

James Franco
Oscar Diggs, 'Oz'
Mila Kunis
Theodora/Wicked
Rachel Weisz
Evanora
Michelle Williams
Annie/Glinda

Zach Braff

Frank/Finley
Bill Cobbs
master tinker
Joey King
girl in wheelchair/
China girl
Tony Cox
Knuck
Stephen R. Hart
Winkie general
Abigail Leigh Spencer
May
Bruce Campbell
Winkie gate keeper

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

11,730 ft +0 frames

Rural Kansas, 1905. Oscar 'Oz' Diggs is an arrogant sideshow magician, interested in little but seducing his female assistants. When the father of one of those assistants, a strongman, takes exception, Oscar runs for shelter in a tethered hot-air balloon, which is then sucked up into a tornado. Weathering the storm, Oscar finds himself in a foreign land of strange flora and fauna. He meets a witch, Theodora, who informs him that he is in Oz. She takes Oscar to be the wizard whose arrival has been prophesied, and who will free Oz from the oppression of a wicked witch and become ruler of the Emerald City. After meeting Theodora's sister Evanora, Oz sets off after 'wicked' witch Glinda. He is accompanied by a flying monkey, and they are joined on the way by the orphan China Girl. When they finally find Glinda, she informs Oscar that he's been working for the wrong side. Evanora, realising that Oscar now knows the truth, sets Theodora against him, using Theodora's jealousy of Glinda to turn her sister wicked. After a crisis of faith, Oscar takes up arms against the Emerald City and the sisters, using the technology and the smoke-and-mirrors trickery of his own world to counter real magic. Creating the illusion that he is a mighty sorcerer, Oscar helps to free Oz. He kisses Glinda and takes his place on the throne.

Promised Land

USA/United Arab Emirates 2012
Director: Gus Van Sant



What lies beneath: Matt Damon, Frances McDormand

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

Filmed in farmland Pennsylvania, Gus Van Sant's new fracking drama is set rather in Everywhersville, USA, its cinematic coordinates on a line of longitude with the political fables of Frank Capra. Moses first scoped out the Promised Land, John Steinbeck later ironising the promise for Depression-era America with the disappointment of California for migrant workers in his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In Van Sant's film, the bounteous American earth offers potential salvation for a recession-hit agricultural community, their land promised to a natural-gas company who will drill into its subterranean crust to release trapped gases, making petty fortunes for the landowners and untold millions more for the corporation.

God's-eye-view shots of the car of contractors Steve Butler (Matt Damon) and his partner Sue Thomason (Frances McDormand), travelling to

the town of McKinley to smooth the path for the sale of drilling rights to the terrain, tell us everything we need to know about the film's righteous indignation at the proposed rape of the land. Steve has been cherry-picked for the task by his employer, Global Crosspower Solutions. In a skin-crawling opening scene in a plush, metropolitan restaurant, Steve explains his impressive track record in mollifying the anxieties of ordinary Joes through his ability to tap into the yokel mindset. His own beginnings in a bankrupted rural town have instilled in him a nigh-on evangelical attitude to the saving graces of big business.

Co-written by Damon and originally intended as his directorial debut, *Promised Land* plays to the actor's strengths, Steve sharing some of the slippery tenacity of Damon's Mr Ripley, every controlled gesture of placid amiability marshalled in the services of ingratiation. Fish out of water

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Matt Damon
John Krasinski
Chris Moore
Screenplay
John Krasinski
Matt Damon
Story
Dave Eggers
Director of Photography
Linus Sandgren
Editor
Billy Rich

Production Designer

Daniel B. Clancy
Music
Danny Elfman
Production Sound Mixer
Felix Andrew
Costume Designer
Juliet Polcsa

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Production Companies
Focus Features

presents in association with Participant Media and Image Nation Abu Dhabi a Sunday Night, Pearl Street, Media Farm production A Gus Van Sant film
Executive Producers
Gus Van Sant
Ron Schmidt
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King

Cast

Matt Damon
Steve Butler
John Krasinski
Dustin Noble
Frances McDormand
Sue Thomason
Rosemarie DeWitt
Alice
Scot McNairy
Jeff Dennon
Titus Welliver
Rob

Hal Holbrook
Frank Yates
Benjamin Sheeler
attendant
Terry Kinney
David Churchill
Carla Bianco
waitress
Joe Coyle
Michael Downey
Dorothy Silver
Arlene

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International
UK & Eire

Pennsylvania, the present. Steve Butler and Sue Thomason, employees of natural-gas company Global, travel to the farming town of McKinley to finish a deal with the citizens to sign over drilling rights to their land. Steve is himself from a poor farming community and expert at winning over the sympathies of ordinary people.

Expecting an easy time, the pair meet resistance at a town hearing, when local schoolteacher Frank Yates speaks up about the dangers of fracking (extracting the gas via hydraulic fracturing). At a bar, Steve befriends local woman Alice, and gets drunk in order to ingratiate himself with the townspeople. An environmental activist, Dustin Noble, shows up in town, telling people how fracking in his hometown led to the poisoning of farm animals and the destruction of the local economy. Frustrated by Dustin's

influence on local opinion, Steve and Sue bribe him to drop his campaign, though Dustin subsequently continues, denying knowledge of the money that's changed hands. Steve worries that Alice is swayed by Dustin's slurs, and Dustin later woos Alice himself.

Steve meets with landowners, getting many of them to sign the agreement but meeting hostility from others. The discovery that Dustin's backstory is a lie discredits his argument, and Steve later finds out that Dustin is in fact a Global employee – a plant sent to pre-empt any environmental lobbying. As the townspeople gather to vote on whether to sign over their land, Steve delivers a speech admitting the corruption of Global and the potential risks involved in the drilling. Steve is fired. He decides to remain in McKinley to pursue his relationship with Alice.

Rebellion

France 2011
Director: Mathieu Kassovitz
Certificate 15 134m 58s

during what they hope will be a quick stay-over in small-town America, Steve and Sue are always at work, their personalities subsumed in their business's project, every conversation and encounter they have with McKinley's inhabitants calibrated to serve Global and widen the profit margin. Steve is a terrific study in niceness, and how it can be perverted. If you come away from *Promised Land* with anything, it's the memory of the fissures that slowly open up in Steve's practised geniality, frustration gnawing away at his composure as Global's interests are stymied.

Elsewhere, Van Sant's drama works hard to muddy the city/country dichotomy. The proprietor of a convenience store called 'Guns, Groceries, Guitars and Gas' proves wilier than Steve and Sue expect; the town mayor all but rubs his hands with glee at the prospect of making his fracking fortune, attempting to blackmail Steve for a larger percentage; and when elderly schoolteacher Frank Yates (Hal Holbrook, mainlining honest-to-goodness nobility) speaks his mind about the dangers of fracking at a town hearing, Steve errs in writing him off as a hayseed dilettante, discovering afterwards that he's a retired MIT academic. The stage seems to be set for a *Local Hero*-style showdown between corporate might and good ol'-fashioned rural decency, yet there's something chilling beyond words about the ease with which the wonderfully named Dustin Noble (John Krasinski), an environmental activist who's turned up in town with an axe to grind against Global, sways the local bar to his cause with an open-mic rendition of Bruce Springsteen's 'Dancing in the Dark'.

It's Noble who gets under Steve's skin, occasioning several memorably controlled flip-outs, Steve's vexation at this fly in the ointment creating momentary ripples in his rictus nice-guy facade. What's worse, Noble proves a love rival for Steve, stealing the affections of local girl Alice (Rosemarie DeWitt) who seems to have been waiting her whole life for these two paragons of male competitiveness to stroll into town.

The discordant notes in *Promised Land* are slowly ground away in favour of a hand-wringing endorsement of small-town integrity, Van Sant drilling down into the wholesome bedrock of America, careless of what miasmas of sentimentality he unleashes. The film's sweet-toothed nadir comes prior to the climactic town meeting, where McKinley residents must vote on whether or not to accept Global's offer. Steve hands over green notes for a 25-cent glass of homemade lemonade, but his profligate gesture is rebuffed by the pint-sized Pollyanna manning the stall, providing the city boy with a beatific vision of simple virtue.

The slide into Capra-corn and preachiness is a jarring fit with the film's conspiracy-drama machinations. There may yet be a great film made about fracking, one that mines the same mythic seam as *Chinatown* (1974) or *There Will Be Blood* (2007), those parables on water, oil and American power. But, give or take the biblical rainstorm that intervenes to scupper Global's favour-currying local fete, *Promised Land* remains a simplistic and literal-minded fairytale, marking a slip back into the saccharine for the *Good Will Hunting* (1997) director. **S**



Soldier of misfortune: Mathieu Kassovitz

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

The ironically titled *L'Ordre et la morale* is a film about chaos and unethical politics (the English title *Rebellion* misses this dimension) that belongs to the growing tradition of movies exposing

shameful episodes in 20th-century French history. It deals with the brutal repression by the French army of a group of Kanak independence fighters who killed three French gendarmes and took others hostage in Ouvéa, a



Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Christophe Rossignon
Philip Boëffard
Written by
Mathieu Kassovitz
Pierre Geller
Benoît Jaubert
with the participation
of Serge Frydman
Based on the book
La Morale et l'action
by Philippe Legorjus
**Director of
Photography**
Marc Koninckx
Editors
Mathieu Kassovitz
Thomas Beard
Lionel Devuyt
Art Direction
Bruno Coupé

Emma Cuillery
Giuseppe Ponturo
Melissa Ponturo
Frank
Chicheportiche
Original Music
Klaus Badelt
Sound
Yves Comélieau
Guillaume
Bouchateau
Cyril Holtz
Philippe Amoureux
Costume Designer
Agnès Beziers
Stunt Co-ordinator
Laurent 'Larry'
Alexandre

©Nord-Ouest Films -
UGC Images - Studio

37 - France 2 Cinéma
**Production
Companies**
A Nord-Ouest Films,
UGC, Studio 37 and
France 2 Cinéma
co-production
with the participation
of Orange Cinéma
Séries, France
Télévisions
and the Centre
National du Cinéma
et de l'Image Animée
with the support
of L'Académie - Agence
nationale pour la
cohésion sociale et
l'égalité des chances,
Fonds Images de la
diversité, la province-

Nord de Nouvelle-
Calédonie, la province
des Îles Loyauté de
Nouvelle-Calédonie
and l'aide à
la production
audiovisuelle et
cinématographique
de la Polynésie
Française
In association
with Kasso Inc
Productions,
Cofimage 22,
Cofinova 7,
Soficinéma 6
Developed with
the participation
of Studio Canal
Executive Producer
Eve François Machuel

Cast
Mathieu Kassovitz
Philippe Legorjus
Iabe Lapacas
Alphonse Dianou
Malik Zidi
JM Perrot
Alexandre Steiger
Jean Bianconi
Daniel Martin
Bernard Pons
**Jean-Philippe
Puymartin**
Général de
Gendarmerie Jérôme
**Philippe de
Jacquelin Dulphé**
Général de
Brigade Vidal
Philippe Torretton
Christian Prouteau

Sylvie Testud
Chantal Legorjus

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

12,147 ft + 0 frames

French theatrical title
L'Ordre et la morale

French New Caledonia, April-May 1988. Captain Legorjus, the head of the GIGN (an elite anti-terrorist branch of the Gendarmerie Nationale), is sent with his unit to the island of Ouvéa to deal with an uprising of Kanak separatists which has led to the death of three gendarmes and the taking of 27 hostages. Legorjus finds that the army has also been sent to crush the rebellion. Half the hostages are released. Legorjus and his unit search for the others and eventually locate them, but are taken prisoner. Legorjus wins the trust of Alphonse Dianou, the head of the hostage-

takers, who releases him so that he can negotiate a solution. Against a background of mounting tension, we follow Legorjus going back and forth between the Gendarmerie and army base and the Kanaks over ten days. These events coincide with the French presidential elections, and the government - wanting to show its muscle to the electorate - exaggerates the violence of the Kanaks. Just as Legorjus is about to obtain the peaceful release of the hostages, President Mitterrand orders an assault by the army, during which 19 Kanaks, including Dianou, are brutally killed.

tiny island in New Caledonia, in April/May 1988. Director Mathieu Kassovitz plays lead character Captain Legorjus, head of the GIGN, an elite group of the Gendarmerie Nationale trained to negotiate in hostage and anti-terrorist crises. The film begins with the chaotic final massacre, and one of the first things we hear is Legorjus's voiceover saying, "I failed. I was here to negotiate and I failed." *Rebellion* then proceeds in a long flashback to chart the ten days that led to this disastrous outcome.

Based on a book by the real-life Legorjus, the film is clearly partisan in its sympathy for the legitimate demands and generally non-violent attitude of the Kanaks, historically oppressed by French colonisers and now double-crossed by politicians. The events take place during the 1988 presidential election and *Rebellion* shows the crisis to be cynically exploited by the political class, up to President François Mitterrand. The spectator is also left in no doubt about the divide between the righteous Legorjus and his GIGN team, seeking fair and peaceful solutions, and the martinet-like army command bent on aggressive action. The virulent reactions from army leaders and politicians (including Bernard Pons, the then minister for the overseas territories) when *Rebellion* came out in France in November 2011 may raise issues about a possible bias in Legorjus's version, but at any rate they attest to the explosive nature of the topic and its continued relevance.

Many years in the making, *Rebellion* was a labour of love for Kassovitz, who had to overcome suspicion from the Kanaks, the hostility of the army and a modest €15m budget. Notwithstanding Kassovitz's passionate involvement and the importance of the events, *Rebellion*, as a film, disappoints. No doubt lack of means is to blame for the restricted visual scope (so many shots of Kassovitz looking out of a helicopter) but *Rebellion* strangely lacks tension, despite the explicit countdown (day ten, day nine, etc), not to mention subtlety – the Manichean approach leaves little room for complexity. The performances, apart from Kassovitz's, are unmemorable, and several speeches, such as that of Alphonse Dianou (Iabe Lapacas), the head of the hostage-takers, on the French exploitation of New Caledonia's natural resources, feel overly didactic.

The disappointment with the film derives also, perhaps unfairly, from the fact that Kassovitz's groundbreaking *La Haine* (1995) raised high expectations which never seemed to be met by his subsequent work, much to his chagrin. *Rebellion* has been hailed as a return to form – ie to social and political filmmaking – after an indulgent detour through crime, horror and science fiction. Yet *Rebellion* met with neither popular success (box office in France was very poor) nor critical recognition – the Césars, for instance, ignored it – provoking a notoriously volatile Kassovitz to pour abuse on French cinema via Twitter: "You don't like me. I don't like you either... Go to hell. Good day," ran the most printable, followed by the threat *du jour*, emigration to Russia. Yet he may be well advised to stay in the country he detests; as *La Haine* shows, it is when taking a hard look at France's social dysfunctions that Kassovitz does his best work. ☹

Red Dawn

USA 2012
Director: Dan Bradley
Certificate 12A 93m 26s

Reviewed by Antonia Bettis

"North Korea – it doesn't make any sense," complains teen quarterback Matt Eckert (Josh Peck) as his American hometown is invaded. Matt's big brother Jed (Chris Hemsworth) agrees, insisting there must be a "bigger picture" – which, it will turn out, is support from the Russians.

Russia also played aggressor in John Milius's original *Red Dawn* (1984), but that was at the height of the Cold War, when it really did make sense. Yet in this remake by debut director Dan Bradley, the choice of enemy is arbitrary: the identity of the invaders was cynically changed in post-production from Chinese to North Korean to avoid damage at China's lucrative box office. A mindset that regards all Asians as the same and interchangeable fairly reflects this film's xenophobic ideology.

Jed and Matt create an army of teenage guerrillas, calling themselves the Wolverines. In the absence of a believable invasion, the teens' rites of passage into the American way of NRA-approved patriarchy become the focus, as a new bratpack comes of age learning to kill with guns and to become just like daddy – though preferably if father is a defiant (white) cop rather than a quisling (black) mayor. Jed makes men of all his followers – even, apparently, the women, who are, one rueful young man claims, hilariously, no longer desirable now that they come with AK-47s.

So there is the occasional subversive note introduced, especially when the 'patriot' Wolverines use Viet Cong-style guerrilla warfare and even the kind of terrorist tactics recently practised by militant jihadists against the US. But for the most part *Red Dawn* is unreflective jingoism with little good sense. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Beau Flynn
Tripp Vinson
Screenplay
Carl Ellsworth
Jeremy Passmore
Based on the motion picture *Red Dawn* [1984] screenplay by Kevin Reynolds and John Milius
Director of Photography
Mitchell Amundsen
Editor
Richard Pearson
Production Designer
Dominic Watkins
Music
Ramin Djawadi
Production Sound Mixer
Kirk Francis
Costume Designer
Catherine George
Stunt Co-ordinator
Darrin Prescott

Cast
Chris Hemsworth
Jed Eckert
Josh Peck
Matt Eckert
Josh Hutcherson
Robert
Adrienne Palicki
Toni
Isabel Lucas
Erica Martin
Jeffrey Dean Morgan
Tanner

Connor Cruise
Daryl Jenkins
Edwin Hodge
Danny
Alyssa Diaz
Julie
Julian Alcaraz
Greg
Will Yun Lee
Captain Cho
Brett Cullen
Tom Eckert
Michael Beach
Major Jenkins

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Koch Media
Entertainment

8,409 ft +0 frames

US, the present. After North Korean soldiers occupy Spokane, Washington, Jed and his younger brother Matt witness the execution of their policeman father by Captain Cho. The brothers create a mobile guerrilla unit of teenagers, named the Wolverines. Matt breaks ranks to rescue girlfriend Erica, causing friction with Jed. The Wolverines are recruited by three adult soldiers to steal a communications box from North Korean headquarters. Jed kills Cho, but is then himself killed. Matt continues the insurgency.

Simon Killer

USA 2012
Director: Antonio Campos

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Brady Corbet is building an impressive gallery of creepily rebarbative characters. He was one of the two initially charming young men who torment and kill Naomi Watts and her family in Michael Haneke's American remake of his first hit, *Funny Games U.S.* (2007). In *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (2011) he played the smooth-talking Watts, who lures Martha (Elizabeth Olsen) into the oppressive upstate New York cult where he acts as the cult leader's adjutant and chief pimp. *Martha Marcy* was co-produced by Antonio Campos, who's now given Corbet an even more disquieting role as the eponymous Simon, a young American newly arrived in Paris and hiding coldly sociopathic tendencies under a facade of appealingly boyish vulnerability.

We first meet Simon in his cousin Carlo's Paris apartment, telling Carlo how he broke up with his long-term girlfriend Michelle after smelling another man's body on her when she came to bed. He relates his story sadly but without histrionics, arousing our sympathy. But soon we start to realise that we, like most of the people Simon encounters, may have been duped, since he's a congenital liar; and by the end of the film it's hard to know what if anything we've learned from him is true. Was that really why he broke up with Michelle? Indeed, did she even exist? We hear, in Simon's voiceover, the text of emails he sends her, and we hear one from her in reply – but it's read in Simon's voice, sparking further doubts. This sense of uncertainty spreads and thickens, darkening the whole film – especially since Simon's hardly ever off screen and we're shown everything through his eyes.

Campos heightens this unsettling mood through distinctive use of visual and sound devices. Transitions between scenes are often marked not by simple fades or cuts but by stroboscopic, pulsing curves of colour that wash across the screen, as if camouflaging or cancelling out whatever came before. In long, unbroken takes the camera prowls close behind Simon's head, Dardennes-style, as he mooches through the Paris streets – or oscillates back and forth in long, slow panning shots with all the lazy menace of a snake's head about to strike. The score too evokes a queasy subjectivity: we often hear whatever Simon is playing on his iPod, so even the music comes to us filtered through his consciousness. In one long wordless sequence he dances android-like with two French girls in a nightclub to LCD Soundsystem's 'Dance Yrself Clean' with its jerky, obsessive beat and nervous lyrics ("Present company accepting/ Presently we all expect the worst/ Works just like a need").

On the basis of his two features to date, Campos shows a predilection for distinctly unloveable protagonists. His first full-length outing as director, *After School* (2008), starred Ezra Miller – in a dry run for his chilling performance in the title role of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* – as an awkward loner in a prestigious upstate New York private school who finds an outlet in videomaking. When he encounters two girls dying of an overdose he calmly films them instead of running for help. Simon shows an equally callous disregard for those around him, especially the naive and tender-hearted hooker



American psycho: Brady Corbet

Victoria, touchingly played by Mati Diop (Alex Descas's daughter in Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum*), whom he moves in with and batters on to. He often recalls another conscienceless American abroad, Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley – except that Ripley would never embark on such a crude, foredoomed scheme as the clumsy blackmail scam that Simon talks Victoria into.

The script, co-credited to Campos, Corbet and Diop, throws out oblique clues to Simon's skewed, scarily self-directed take on the world. Asked about his graduate work, he says it was concerned with neuroscience and the process of perception, "the relationship between the eye and the brain", proudly adding that his work was published. (All this of course may be another of his elaborate inventions; he tells a suspicious

airport security officer that he studied French literature.) His approach to sex is primarily voyeuristic, first asking both Victoria and a blonde French girl, Marianne, whom he later takes up with, "Can I just look at you?" Marianne, probably the less experienced of the two, is spooked by this. "I don't like... the way you're looking at me," she says, echoing a remark in Michelle's email (if indeed it is from her): "The last time I saw you, you frightened me." In a final – and, as ever, mendacious – message to Michelle as he leaves France, Simon tries to reassure her, "Whatever happened before, I'm not dangerous."

Like *Afterschool*, *Simon Killer* builds slowly, sometimes drifting towards stasis. But it's a film that rewards patience, leaving a lasting – if uncomfortable – impression on the memory. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Josh Mond
Sean Durkin
Matt Palmieri
Written by
Antonio Campos
Story
Antonio Campos
Brady Corbet
Mati Diop

Photographed by

Joe Anderson
Editors
Zac Stuart-Pontier
Antonio Campos
Babak Jalali
Production Designer
Nicolas de Boisguillé
Music
Saunders Jurriaans
Danny Bensi

Supervising

Sound Editor
Coll Anderson
Costume Designer
Laetitia Bouix

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Production Companies
FilmHaven
Entertainment

presents a Borderline
Films production
Film Extracts
Lourdes (2009)

Cast

Brady Corbet
Simon
Mati Diop
Victoria/Noura

Constance Rousseau

Marianne
Lila Salet
Sophie
Solo
René
Michaël Abiteboul
Jean
Nicolas Ronchi
Carlo

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor

Eureka Entertainment

Present-day Paris. Simon, a New York postgraduate who's just split up with his girlfriend of five years, arrives at the apartment of his cousin Carlo. He's arranged to use the apartment while Carlo is away in the South of France. Lonely and aimless, Simon fails miserably in his attempt to pick up two French girls, Marianne and Sophie. In a Pigalle clip joint he meets a sympathetic young hooker, Victoria. They go back to her apartment to have sex. Simon deliberately gets himself beaten up at the Gare du Nord to induce Victoria to pity him, and she lets him move in.

Simon suggests that Victoria should film herself

having sex with her married clients and then blackmail them. The first mark, Jean, turns out to be a brutal cop who scares Simon off and later returns and beats up Victoria. A gentle black man, René, proves more amenable and gives Simon money, but then disappears. Simon meets Marianne again in the street, takes her to a nightclub and spends the night with her. When Simon returns to Victoria she tells him to get out. He beats her savagely and leaves her for dead. Marianne refuses to let him stay in her apartment. Simon collects his belongings from Carlo and catches a plane out of France. But Victoria may not be dead.

Snitch

USA/Canada/United Arab Emirates 2012

Director: Ric Roman Waugh

Certificate 12A 112m Os

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Snitch shares its title and little else with a 1999 episode of the American documentary news show *Frontline*. The basis for the 'inspired by true events' opening card is the story of James Settembrino, whose 18-year-old son was arrested in 1992 for selling acid. Settembrino agreed to get his son's sentence reduced by helping to find a major drug trafficker to arrest. After mortgaging his house for the \$70,000 necessary to arrange a meeting with a South American smuggler, Settembrino lost his deal when the supervising federal prosecutor took umbrage at a routine appeal motion, and as a result Settembrino's son was sentenced to a full ten years for a first-time offence. *Snitch* has the set-up but updates the age, actually gets to the sting, and delivers happy endings all round.

Former stuntman Ric Roman Waugh's fourth feature is an effective polemic against the hastily enacted, socially destructive mandatory minimum sentence laws – one of the main reasons for America's high prison population (the highest in the world). When son Jason (Rafi Gavron) is arrested, construction boss John Matthews (Dwayne Johnson) gets a stats-heavy crash course in the country's drug laws. Since first-time offender Jason doesn't have any dealer friends to rat out (which would help reduce his sentence from ten to two years), John offers himself up as a substitute snitch. Through employee Daniel (Jon Bernthal), he meets a dealer to set up, fearsome trafficker Malik (Michael Kenneth Williams).

Williams will forever be associated with his role as more-myth-than-real gangland outlaw Omar in HBO's *The Wire*, a part whose connotations he's coasted on before (in 2007's *Gone Baby Gone*). Until his appearance, *Snitch* is commendably low-key and atmospherically credible. Shreveport, Louisiana effectively doubles for Jefferson City, Missouri, all urban outskirts of featureless land populated solely by construction companies and other functional/industrial spaces. Waugh says that many of his onscreen DEA agents and drug-gang members were the real deal, and many scenes have the intangible feel of atmospheric verisimilitude. But Williams's appearance is a sign of a shift into more outlandish terrain, climaxing — after often padded-out drama — with a truck-versus-cars chase as over-the-top as it is impressive, with old-school stunt derring-do taking the place of fluffy CGI.

Snitch's action-movie ending has relatively little to do with the realistic



The parent trap: Dwayne Johnson

➔ drama it starts with. In a recession economy, John is perfectly credible as a hardworking small businessman just looking for another income source to take care of his family. "It's all gone to shit," he says, "and I don't see any sign of it coming back." The movie is appropriately shot in unfussy but serviceable digital, DP Dana Gonzales's response to the cruddy environments. The cartoonishly huge Johnson is forced to keep his body in suppressed check, and his palpable neutering by circumstance registers strongly. Solid support is provided by Bernthal – and ironic chuckles by the famously liberal Susan Sarandon as an election-minded Republican prosecutor.

Avoiding discussion of the drugs war as a whole, the movie bores in on the tyranny of multiple minimums, confining its portrait of border cartels to fierce gun-toting Mexicans led by El Topo (Benjamin Bratt). These over-the-top late interventions juice up a film that gets bogged down in rote father-son drama (John worries that his absence as a husband and father has led to Jason's fate; Jason worries that his dad hates him). Despite its longueurs, *Snitch* is commendably clear about its target – then apologises for possibly boring you by bringing out the artillery. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nigel Sinclair
Matt Jackson
Jonathan King
Dwayne Johnson
Dany Garcia
Alex Brunner
Tobin Armbrust
Written by
Justin Haythe
Ric Roman Waugh
Inspired by
the *Frontline*
documentary *Snitch*
Director of Photography
Dana Gonzales
Film Editor
Jonathan Chibnall
Production Designer
Vincent Reynaud
Music
Antonio Pinto
Production Mixer
Steve Aaron
Costume Designer
Kimberly
Adams-Galligan

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Holdings, LLC

Production Companies
Summit
Entertainment,
Exclusive Media
and Participant
Media present in
association with
Image Nation
Abu Dhabi
An Exclusive
Media production
in association
with Front Street
Productions
A Ric Roman
Waugh film
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Guy East
Becki Cross Trujillo
David Fanning
Justin Haythe

Cast
Dwayne Johnson
John Matthews
Barry Pepper
Agent Billy Cooper

Jon Bernthal
Daniel
Michael K. Williams
Malik
Melina
Kanakaredes
Sylvie Collins
Nadine Velazquez
Analisa
Rafi Gavron
Jason Collins
David Harbour
Jay Price
Benjamin Bratt
Juan Carlos 'El
Topo' Pintera
Susan Sarandon
Joanne Keeghan
Lela Loren
Vanessa
J.D. Pardo
Benicio

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

Jefferson City, Missouri, the present. High-school student Jason agrees to receive an MDMA shipment from a friend, but he is arrested in a set-up and faces a mandatory minimum prison term of ten years unless he can provide information on another dealer. Because he doesn't know any other dealers, Jason is unable to cooperate. His father John, who runs a construction company, asks the prosecuting attorney if he can act as an informant in his son's place. Through employee Daniel, he meets drug lord Malik and offers his business's trucks as transport. The police are supposed to arrest Malik following a trial delivery, but they hold back when Malik offers to introduce John to a kingpin; John is pressured into continuing the sting. His identity is discovered by the Mexican drug gang he's supposed to be working for. He eludes them in a car chase. The drug lords are arrested, and Jason is released from prison.

Spring Breakers

USA/France/Canada 2012

Director: Harmony Korine

Certificate 18 93m 35s

See Feature
on page 26

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"The Selena Gomez fans are going to be so screwed up by this," said a guy sitting behind me as *Spring Breakers* was about to play to a packed, tangibly excited house – for Harmony Korine's fifth feature film and first collaboration with fellow multimedia wiseacre James Franco arrives on a groundswell of anticipation. This sentiment encapsulates the general line on *Spring Breakers*, which is being discussed as a Trojan horse, smuggling avant-garde aesthetics into a movie starring Justin Bieber's ex and *Wizards of Waverly Place* actress Gomez, Vanessa Hudgens of Disney's *High School Musical* trilogy and ABC Family network starlet Ashley Benson, alongside Korine's own young wife Rachel. *Spring Breakers* has been touted as a prankish, subversive work to knock these Disney princesses off their family-friendly pedestals and drag them into the subconscious murk of American fantasy life, where Korine dwells. And *Spring Breakers* is a prank all right – but is the joke on Gomez's fans?

Spring Breakers exists in a deep valley overshadowed by the twin peaks of Larry Clark's *Bully* (2001) and Hype Williams's *Belly* (1998). Made by the director of 1995's *Kids*, the best movie Korine was ever involved with, *Bully* also has violent young-adult amorality as its subject, and is also set in Florida, that most obscenely dangling state of the US, where Pee-wee Herman was arrested for public indecency and Anna Nicole Smith went to die. *Belly*, meanwhile, is the to-date only feature by Williams, the chief music videomaker for Bad Boy Records in their flash 'shiny suits' era. There's a scene in *Belly* where a character throws Korine's *Gummo* on the flatscreen, and now Korine has repaid the homage by lifting *Belly*'s day-glo, phosphorescent palette wholesale – Korine has been describing the artificial 'taste the rainbow' visual texture of *Spring Breakers* as "Skittles". But Korine has little of Williams's talent for riding a beat with hooky images, and the pop daydream of *Spring Breakers* doesn't manage the zeitgeist snapshot of

Clark's film, which catches the moment when Eminem was exploding on to the national scene, while simultaneously analysing the dangerous suburban angst tapped by Em's popularity.

The *Spring Breakers* score is by Skrillex and Cliff Martinez, though ageing enfant terrible Korine has the girls singing along to Britney Spears's 'Baby One More Time' and Nelly's 'Hot in Herre' – practically golden oldies. A onetime intimate of Ol' Dirty Bastard and a student of Norwegian black metal, Korine does still have a gift for brokering passage into extreme subcultures; in *Spring Breakers*, his coup is the casting of Gucci Mane, one of the foremost practitioners of Southern 'trap' rap, which is based in crack-slinging street culture. Gucci, whose rap sheet is the whole of his qualification for the role of Archie, is playing the mentor-turned-rival to Franco's white-boy rapper Alien, a character based on sartorialist Houston-based rapper Riff Raff, as well as Florida's Dangeruss.

There hasn't been such a complete usurpation of black underclass dangerousness (Dangerussness?) since Gary Oldman's dreadlocked pimp in *True Romance* in 1993, but Franco's wigger clowning has no such dead-bluff sincerity. Alien's takeaway moment is his look-at-my-shit monologue, a materialistic soliloquy in which he enumerates his hoarded treasures for an appreciative audience of girls – "Scarface on repeat... Calvin Klein Escape... Blue Kool-Aid" – and Franco almost breaks character, giggling, when he gets around to mentioning his nunchucks. That this remains in the final cut means that Korine and Franco want to show their hand, invite their audience into the big put-on, let on about the degree to which everything in their movie exists between air quotes.

Less a movie than a 'movie', *Spring Breakers* has approximately one moment when it seems to be going somewhere unexpected. During foreplay preceding a threesome, Hudgens and Benson's characters grab guns from Alien's arsenal and force him to fellate the barrels – which he not only does, but does with earnest, deep-throating enthusiasm, as though this sexual role-play

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Chris Hanley
Jordan Gertner
David Zander
Charles-Marie
Anthonioz
Written by
Harmony Korine
Director of Photography
Benoit Debie
Editor
Douglas Crise
Production Designer

Elliott Hostetter
Original Score
Cliff Martinez
Skrillex
Location Sound Mixer
Alex Altman
Costume Designer
Heidi Bivens

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Breakers, LLC
Production Companies

Hero presents a
Muse/Radar
production in
association
with POP Films,
MJZ, Iconoclast,
O'Salvation, Division,
Rabbit Bandini
A Harmony
Korine film
Executive Producers
Fernando Sulichin
Ted Field
Jane Holzer

Megan Ellison
Stella Schnabel
Agnés B
Vince Jolivet
Miles Levy
Aeysha Walsh
Vikram Chatwal
Wicks Walker
Chris Contogouris

Cast
James Franco
Alien

Vanessa Hudgens
Candy
Selena Gomez
Faith
Ashley Benson
Brit
Rachel Korine
Cotty
Gucci Mane
Archie
Heather Morris
Bess
Ashley Lendzion
Forest

Emma Jane Holzer
Heather

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
Vertigo Films

8,422 ft +8 frames

US, the present. At a provincial campus, a group of college friends realise that the money they've saved won't be enough to pay for their spring break. Candy, Brit and Cotty impulsively decide to hold up a restaurant with squirt guns. Using the proceeds, they head for Florida, bringing along a fourth friend, the devout and innocent Faith. After days of ceaseless partying and binge-drinking, the friends are arrested. To their surprise, they are sprung from prison by local rapper and drug dealer Alien. Discomfited

by Alien's come-on, Faith decides to take the next bus out of town. The other girls stay on, funding their decadent lifestyle by stealing from other holidaymakers. This angers Archie, the local vice king and Alien's former mentor; he begins a shooting war with Alien and the girls. After being wounded in a drive-by shooting, Cotty too catches the bus home. Candy, Brit and Alien stage a reprisal raid on Archie's compound. Alien is shot, but Candy and Brit mow down Archie's henchmen, then kill Archie.

21 & Over

USA 2012
Directors: Jon Lucas, Scott Moore
Certificate 15 93m 0s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

21 & Over is the directorial debut of Jon Lucas and Scott Moore, whose script laid the foundation for *The Hangover*'s \$467 million worldwide. It's a comparatively modest affair, costing a mere \$12 million. Part of the financing came from Chinese sources through a deal engineered by production company/distributor Relativity, the money provided on condition that cast and crew repair to China after primary shooting in Seattle to film bookends for an entirely different movie, one transforming Chinese-American character Jeff Chang (Justin Chon) into a Chinese transfer student who returns home chastened by his experiences and ready to reject American debauchery and embrace responsibility. Previous changes to court approval for release in China have included cutting scenes or (as in the case of *Looper*) beefing up Shanghai's screen time, but as the *Los Angeles Times* noted, this is the first type of accommodation made for the purposes of a film that "actively cast[s] the US in a bad light".

The original version does a fair job of this on its own. It's a lazy remake of *Superbad* (2007) sutured to a subplot from *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004). Former high-school buddies Miller (Miles Teller) and Casey (Skylar Astin) reunite to surprise Jeff on his 21st birthday with a wild night out. One drink leads to another, and Miller and Casey must figure out how to get an unconscious Jeff home in time for a medical school interview. There are jokes about angry Latina sorority girls being scary man-haters, and one of the most gratuitous topless shots on record as a shirtless girl runs from a bull. The film's vision of ultimate good times — beer pong, heavy drinking and boorishness — is thoroughly depressing. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Hugo Shong
Ryan Kavanaugh
David Hoberman
Todd Lieberman
Written by
Jon Lucas
Scott Moore
Director of Photography
Terry Stacey
Editor
John Refoua
Production Designer
Jerry Fleming
Music/Score Composed, Produced, Recorded and Mixed by
Lyle Workman
Production Sound Mixer
Robert Marts
Costume Designer
Christine Wada

©Twenty
One and Over

Productions, Inc
Production Companies
Relativity Media
presents in
association with Sky
Land Entertainment
and Virgin Produced
a Relativity Media,
Mandeville Films
production
Executive Producers
Jon Lucas
Scott Moore
Luo Yan
Andy Yan
David Manpearl
Jason Felts
Ron Burkle
Jason Colbeck
Tucker Tooley

Cast
Miles Teller
Miller
Skylar Astin
Casey
Justin Chon

Jeff Chang
Sarah Wright
Nicole
Jonathan Keltz
Randy
François Chau
Dr Chang

Dolby Digital/
Datasat Digital
Sound
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Momentum Pictures

8,370 ft +0 frames

US, the present. Miller and Casey persuade their friend Jeff Chang to go out for a drink to celebrate his 21st birthday, even though he has to attend a medical school interview arranged by his strict father the next day. Jeff becomes drunk and passes out. After a series of misadventures, Miller and Casey get Jeff ready for his interview, but he says he doesn't want to go, and stands up to his father.

Vinyl

United Kingdom/USA 2010
Director: Sara Sugarman
Certificate 15 85m 0s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Some bad films are good ideas badly executed, some are well-executed bad ideas. *Vinyl* falls into that gloomy category of terrible ideas badly executed. The problems begin with its premise. Punk casualty Johnny Jones, played by Phil Daniels, is reunited with his old group, The Weapons of Happiness. They write a new song in a drunken haze — a song Johnny is certain is a hit — but the record label won't bite. Johnny and The Weapons are too old. "It'd be like watching your parents have sex," shudders label exec Jimmy. So Johnny puts together a bunch of kids as a group to front the song and expose the industry's hypocrisy and blindness to pure talent. What could go wrong?

One problem is that out in the real world the opposite is true. Old groups reform and play all the time, from The Stooges to The Stone Roses: if old people playing rock music is really thought to be hideously embarrassing, then the receipts for recent Rolling Stones concerts would indicate that embarrassment is big box office. Then there's Johnny's song, 'Free Rock and Roll'. It should be no more than a macguffin, the desired and desirable thing at the heart of the story which props up the action, but it's a photocopy of a caricature of a punk cliché, and *Vinyl* hits the viewer over the head with it at every possible moment, almost on repeat.

The direction by Sara Sugarman (whose previous credits include *Mad Cows* and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*) is at best bland, and her screenwriting only further exposes the badly tuned engine of the scenario. The dialogue is rather like a piece of vinyl: flat and going round in circles. At times you have to think hard about whether what you've just heard was meant to be a joke. When Johnny tells Jimmy over lunch that he doesn't eat meat, Jimmy responds by asking him about Linda McCartney **➔**



Punk's not dead: Keith Allen

was his idea to begin with. Such flip-the-script feminist posturing is set up to collide with, say, a recurring scene of Dionysian partying which stands outside the narrative: bounding tits and ass; young bodies slippery with sunscreen and Lite beer; coeds significantly sucking red, white and blue rocket pops. (The anti-Americanism is 'anti-Americanism', too.) The film's retina-searing visuals, shot by Gaspar Noé collaborator Benoît Debie, have been compared to the hellscapes of Bosch and Brueghel — but MTV provides more accurate points of reference. The beach material is straight from Sisqó's ogling 'Thong Song' clip, and when Alien performs Britney Spears's 'Everytime' on a white baby grand next to his in-ground pool, it's a goof on 90s R&B aesthetics. 'Everytime' accompanies a montage of the girls on the crime spree that funds their spring-break decadence, sticking up holidaymakers — and while Korine has spoken of his film as a "kind of cultural mash-up" made of "undefined connections", the juxtapositions that he builds are mostly rudimentary ironies: saccharine pop over images of criminal savagery; Gomez's wistful phoning home to her grandmother ("I'm starting to think this is the most spiritual place in the world...") over Jell-O shots venality; undergrads drawing dicks while their professor lectures on civil rights.

"Pretend like it's a videogame," says one of the interchangeable girls when prepping their first hold-up. "Act like you're in a movie." It's the same direction that Korine might've given his 'stars'. *Spring Breakers* invites reception not as a character-based narrative film but as a feature-length music video taking place in its protagonists' collective imaginations. Images and bits of dialogue loop back throughout the movie, fugue-like — though very few of them make an impression the first time around. I can vividly remember French artist Cyprien Gaillard's 2009 *Cities of Gold and Mirrors*, a nine-minute piece shot on 16mm at spring break in Cancun and among nearby Mayan ruins, which I saw three years ago; *Spring Breakers*, which I saw last week, is already fading into a neon scribble.

The meta good-girl-gone-bad narrative which truant Disney properties are extratextually enacting in *Spring Breakers* is a metamorphosis that we've come to expect from America's girl pop stars, from Rihanna's album of that very name to Miley Cyrus's 'Can't Be Tamed' to Christina Aguilera's 'Dirty' makeover as Xtina to another sullied Mouseketeer who was the most famous and most spectacularly fallen of all, Britney. In *Spring Breakers*, Korine seeks to explode this phenomenon through caricatured exaggeration. The climax is a shootout between the slumming spring-break bandits and authentic career criminals, in which the remaining girls have absurdly become bulletproof — seemingly a symbolic expression of the way the safety net of privilege allows for hedonism with minimal consequence. And with *Spring Breakers*, which should restore Korine as the court jester of American experimental film, he turns in an accomplishment recalling the critic Andrew Sarris's comments on Frank Tashlin: "One can approve vulgarity in theory as a comment on vulgarity, but in practice all vulgarity is inseparable." **S**

vegetarian sausages. The timing, the editing, the reaction shots all indicate that a joke's been made, but the last time jokes about Linda McCartney sausages were topical you could still buy albums on cassette. Repeated gags about the care homes that former Weapons guitarist Robbie now runs fall even flatter. Old people smell of cabbage! They're incontinent! How this line of humour fits into *Vinyl's* general argument that you're never too old to rock is a mystery. But then *Vinyl* is also strangely dismissive of the teenagers who form the front band, The Single Shots (they can't play and know no musical history, tut their aged punk puppetmasters, with no apparent irony). This and the fact that its cast features several actors with strong connections to punk-era film, in particular Daniels (*Quadrophenia*) and Perry Benson (*Sid & Nancy*) give *Vinyl* a stifling sense of generational complacency. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by John H. Williams Preston Clay Reed Sara Sugarman	presents a Vanguard Films production Preston Clay Reed Films and Mrs Jones	Minto Julia Ford Jules Jones
Written by Sara Sugarman Jim Cooper	present a Sara Sugarman film In association with Diverse Arts and Cwmni Da	James Cartwright Jimmy Breen Chris Turner Griff
Story Jim Cooper	Executive Producers Larry Reid Sue Reid	Jamie Blackley Drainpipe Alexa Davies Flora
Cinematography Benji Bakshi	Editor Hazel Baillie	Daniel Washington Fly
Production Designer Anna Lavelle	Production Designer Sean Walsh	Will Peters Will
Original Music Mike Peters	Letitia Lawson Gary Lippman Andras Hamori	Joel Sugarman Zed
Supervising Sound Editor Ian Morgan	Mark Horowitz Justin Ribbons Craig Shurn	Phyllis McMahon Mrs O'Malley
Costume Design Claire Lester		In Colour
	Cast Phil Daniels Johnny Jones Perry Benson Robbie Keith Allen	Distributor Altive Films
		7,650 ft +0 frames

UK, the present. Johnny Jones is a washed-up punk rocker living in a caravan. When he hears that a friend from the old days has died, he travels to the funeral in north Wales and is reunited with the members of his former band, The Weapons of Happiness, for the first time since he broke them up with little explanation two decades ago. After a long drinking session they go back to the nearby mansion of guitarist Robbie and impulsively work up and record a song. The next morning Johnny listens to the song, 'Free Rock and Roll', and is convinced that it's a hit in the making. However, a visit to the band's old label, Circ, proves fruitless: Johnny is told that he and The Weapons are too old and unmarketable. Back in Wales, Johnny convinces The Weapons that they need a younger front band to get the song into the charts. A group of teenagers are auditioned and recruited as The Single Shots, and Johnny and The Weapons set about educating them in the ways of punk rock. Meanwhile 'Free Rock and Roll' takes off on the radio, and The Single Shots are signed by Circ. Success beckons but cracks soon emerge – Weapons bassist Minto wants the world to know the truth behind the song; Johnny discovers that Drainpipe, lead singer of The Single Shots, may be his lovechild. Johnny and The Weapons rush to London where The Single Shots are about to make their TV debut. They fail to stop the show, but Drainpipe stops it himself and explains that the hit song is actually Johnny's work. The Single Shots then play a song they have written themselves.

We Went to War

Ireland/United Kingdom 2012
Director: Michael Grigsby



Battle scars: 'We went to War'

See Obituary
on page 14

Reviewed by Wally Hammond

Asked during an interview shortly before his death if he had any advice for aspiring filmmakers, the exceptional but little-lauded British documentary-maker Michael Grigsby replied: "Keep it simple!" That phrase could well be the watchword for his own work ever since he directed *Enginemen*, which was, incredibly, screened at a Free Cinema programme more than half a century ago.

He certainly takes his own advice in *We Went to War*, something of an exemplary documentary on the effects of combat on three individuals

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Rebekah Tolley	Film Agency for Wales in association with Shoot for the Moon, More4 and Film4 with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/ Irish Film Board	Council of Wales Executive Producers James Mitchell Andre Singer Keith Potter Alan Maher Paul McGowan
Written by Michael Grigsby Rebekah Tolley	A Soho Moon Pictures and Tarian Films production in association with Channel 4 Presented by Electric Sky Supported by National Lottery through the Arts	In Colour [1.85:1]
Cinematographer Jonas Mortensen		Distributor Tarian Films
Editor Emer Reynolds		
Original Music Gallagher & Lyle		
Sound Recordist David Lindsay		
@Soho Moon Pictures and Tarian Films Production Companies		

At the start of this documentary by Michael Grigsby, a brief title informs viewers of his 1970 film 'I Was a Soldier', which profiled three young Americans returned from the Vietnam War: Dennis Bolinger, from the town of Brady, and David Johnson and James Lamar Wyatt, both from Menard. In 'We Went to War', Grigsby returns to their stories four decades later. Brief titles identify the now sixtysomething Dennis and David, alongside archive footage of Lamar, who died in 2002.

Dennis and David are interviewed about their thoughts and feelings about their wartime experiences and the continuing effects those experiences have had on them and their families over the intervening years. In the absence of Lamar, his wife Barbara Wyatt and daughter Michelle Carlile are interviewed. The interviews are intercut with archive footage, mostly from the earlier film. In addition, David is filmed listening to two Iraq War veterans whose experiences echo his own. The film ends with a helicopter shot of a pickup truck traversing the Texan landscape, the soundtrack filled with the unidentified voices of present-day war veterans.

with experience of one specific war. The film is a follow-up to Grigsby's 1970 documentary *I Was a Soldier*, which focused on three young Texans returned from fighting in Vietnam. One of the three, Lamar Wyatt, died a decade ago, but it is a tribute to the subtlety, artistry and keen professional judgement shown in this new film that his story is as keenly felt as those of his two living Vietvet colleagues, David Johnson (his schoolfriend) and Dennis Bolinger.

The simplicity shown in the film is essentially that of approach: at all times, attention to the experience (the director would say 'feelings') of the subjects is paramount. To that end – and in contrast to the predilection for the foregrounding of filmmakers in contemporary documentary work – Grigsby forgoes much of the available 'editorial' apparatus (director's presence, contextual interviews, 'guiding' informational bulletins and so on) in order to allow, as he puts it, "thought and emotion time".

In fact, there is probably as much 'breathing' space in *We Went to War* as there is talk and tell. Indeed, there is often as much breathing space during the talk and tell. For example, at the film's beginning, a sweeping helicopter shot designed by cinematographer Jonas Mortensen gives emotional volume to the words we hear emanating from a travelling pickup truck (presumably Dennis's): "I am slowly becoming mired in my own apathy. As a consequence, I have become somebody I do not know." Likewise the evocation of a light-dappled evening outside town gives a moving visual accompaniment to David's sense of a lost Eden: "You come back to a place that is supposed to be heaven. It is heaven. But it [Vietnam] all comes back to you."

David, a rancher and family man, is the more emotional of the two survivors; Dennis, a self-confessed loner, the more pragmatic though also the more contradictory. Grigsby and his co-director Rebekah Tolley have done a wonderful job establishing the trust that enables both men to provide such an articulate and moving expression of the terrors, guilt and confusion wrought by war, and the longevity of its effects. Social documentaries of this exceptional quality have another quality, beyond their informative interest, their aesthetic and poetic pleasures and their emotional force – and that's their power to instill in the viewer a sense of sheer privilege at being able to hear and feel the testimonies of the people to whom they give voice. **S**

White Elephant

Spain/Argentina/France 2012
Director: Pablo Trapero

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Across his seven features to date, Pablo Trapero has become one of Argentine cinema's most astute sociological analysts, displaying a particular interest in official corruption and the neglect and exploitation of the poor in his native Buenos Aires. The subject of Catholic priests striving to improve lives in a shantytown based in and around a huge but uncompleted and long-abandoned hospital building (whose nickname gives the film its title) would seem to be a perfect subject for him, and indeed *White Elephant* may be the closest thing yet to a 'typical' Trapero film, even if this means that its considerable situational and cinematic strengths are offset by occasional melodramatic weaknesses.

White Elephant's inspiration was Carlos Mugica (1930-74), a Catholic priest who was assassinated for his increasingly overt political activism – the film (which is dedicated to him) pauses for an impassioned eulogy and a trip to his memorial wall, while a story about his appearance in a dream makes it clear that he still casts a long shadow over Buenos Aires. His torch is carried in the film by Father Julián (Ricardo Darín) and the younger Father Nicolás (Jérémy Renier), whose differences of temperament and opinion provide much of the film's dramatic tension ("You don't know how to hate," Nicolás complains at one point, although this changes when one of their colleagues is murdered by drug gangs). Julián has similar difficulties with his more conservative and therefore obstructive superiors, who among other things control much needed construction funds – a subplot involving unpaid and exploited workers evokes a theme familiar from Trapero's work since his debut *Crane World* in 1999.

He and regular cinematographer Guillermo Nieto (who shot all Trapero's features between 2002's *El bonaerense* and 2008's *Lion's Den*) use their favoured Scope frame with unostentatious confidence, even during the frequent handheld journeys through the slums' rickety structures, which thankfully provoke only fleeting memories of the tonally very different *City of God* (2002). Only the presence of familiar actors detracts from the otherwise convincing illusion that much of *White Elephant* is authentic *cinéma vérité*. Trapero remains as fascinated by day-to-day minutiae as he is by wider narrative issues. Images are often infused with multiple layers of meaning, starting with the opening shot of Julián having a brain scan, establishing both a potentially serious health issue and the fact that he has access to facilities out of reach of most of the people whose lot he's trying to improve. Similarly, a rain-soaked funeral procession, its participants firing guns into the air, conveys both grief and a desire for revenge.

Performances, always a strength in Trapero's films, are wholly convincing here, with previous collaborators such as Darín and Trapero's actress-producer wife Martina Gusmán (as slum social worker Luciana) mingling with non-professionals and a Belgian import, Jérémy Renier, whose experience with the films of Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne ensures that he fits in seamlessly here. Disappointingly, despite a promising early scene where Luciana and Nicolás hold an informal discussion with



Father figure: Jérémy Renier

various slum dwellers (during which newcomer Nicolás is judged sufficiently 'cool' to consort with them after demonstrating his proficiency at swearing in French and Spanish), the latter spend most of the film in the background, a Verdian chorus without the rousing tunes. (Although Michael Nyman's stately score imbues the film's downtrodden subjects with some measure of dignity, the interpolation of a piece originally used in Peter Greenaway's *Drowning by Numbers* may be distracting to those who recognise it, especially since it accompanies shots of children playing in water.)

Trapero's more recent films have sometimes shown a tendency towards melodrama that becomes increasingly pronounced in the final act, and *White Elephant* falls prey to this too,

especially in the overly pat climax with its symbolic fusion of political statement and self-sacrifice. Although Darín tries hard to add shading and nuance, Father Julián is simply not as complex or challenging a role as the crooked lawyer Sosa in *Carancho* (2010); the young hothead Father Nicolás is an equally familiar archetype; and Gusmán is given little to do compared with her barnstorming turns in *Carancho* and *Lion's Den* (2008). Still, with the election of a former Archbishop of Buenos Aires as the first non-European Pope in more than a thousand years, the central issue of the Catholic Church's involvement with Argentina's poor has suddenly come under the global spotlight in a way that neither Trapero nor the film's distributors could have anticipated. 📌

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Juan Gordon
Pablo Trapero
Juan Vera
Juan Pablo Galli
Alejandro Caccetta
Written by
Alejandro Fadel
Martín Mauregui
Santiago Mitre
Pablo Trapero
Director of Photography
Guillermo Nieto
Editor
Pablo Trapero
Nacho Ruiz Capillas
Production Designer
Juan Pedro de Gaspar
Music
Michael Nyman
Sound
Carlos Lidón
Costume Designer
Marisa Urruti

©Morena Films/
Matanza Cin/
Patagonik/Borsalino
Productions/
Maneki Films/Arte
France Cinéma
Production Companies
A Morena Films,

Matanza Cine,
Patagonik production
In co-production
with Full House, Arte
France Cinéma
With the participation
of TVE, Canal+
España, Canal+
France, Ciné+, ARTE
In association
with Wild Bunch,
Soficinéma 8
With the support
of ICAA, INCAA,
Fondeart, Media
i2i Audiovisual
Programme of the
European Union
Executive Producers
Alejandro Caccetta
Pablo Trapero

Cast
Ricardo Darín
Father Julián
Jérémy Renier
Father Nicolás
Martina Gusmán
Luciana
Federico Benjamín
Barga
Monito
Walter Alfredo Jakob
Lisandro

Mauricio Sergio Minetti
Cruz
Paul Ramos
Bishop
Pablo Gatti
Sandoval
Tatiana Giménez
Tati
Susana Varela
Carmelita
Julio Zarza
Danilo
Stella Maris Delacroix
Rosa
Esteban Díaz
Chato

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Axiom Films Limited

Spanish
theatrical title
Elefante blanco

Buenos Aires, the present. After undergoing a brain scan, Catholic priest Father Julián travels to the Amazon jungle to rescue his younger French counterpart Father Nicolás, the survivor of a village massacre. Back home, Julián introduces Nicolás to Villa María, the shantytown where he works, to his colleagues Cruz, Lisandro and Luciana, and to the slum's inhabitants, including teenage drug addict Monito. Nicolás and Luciana grow increasingly close, especially after they're caught up in a drugs-related shootout. Nicolás tries to mediate with local gangsters (retrieving the body of one of their victims in the process), and is strongly criticised by Julián, who is worried about reprisals if they're seen to take sides. While Nicolás and Luciana make love, Julián worries about living up to the ideals of the Argentine activist-priest Carlos Mugica. Armed police raid the slum, and Julián tries to calm things down. Nicolás discovers that Julián may be gravely ill. Unpaid construction workers charged with slum renovation go on strike. Cruz is murdered by gangsters. Construction recommences with the help of volunteers, but Julián is officially criticised for his intervention after the slum dwellers stage an occupation. An attempted eviction triggers a near-riot, and Monito is wounded, telling Julián that this followed his killing of a policeman. Julián and Nicolás try to drive Monito to hospital. They are stopped at a roadblock, and in the ensuing melee Julián threatens a policeman with a gun and is shot dead. A mass vigil is held in Julián's memory.

Home cinema



Through a glass darkly: B.S. Johnson committed suicide a fortnight after his eccentric film essay 'Fat Man on a Beach' (1974) was completed

'DO YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD A STORY?'

After years of advocacy from his admirers, novelist B.S. Johnson's witty and ambitious short films have finally been made available

YOU'RE HUMAN LIKE THE REST OF THEM: THE FILMS OF B.S. JOHNSON

B.S. Johnson; UK 1967-1974; BFI Flipside/Region 2 DVD and Region B Blu-ray Dual-Format; Certificate 12; 160 minutes; Aspect Ratio: 1.33:1; Features: 'The Johnson Papers' (2013): inside the British Library's archive; booklet with contributions by Jonathan Coe, Bruce Beresford, Michael Bakewell, Carmen Calli, David Quantick, Julia Jordan and Dan Fox

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

B.S. Johnson thought of himself as a poet, is best known as a novelist and, before he killed himself in 1973 at the age of 40, directed a number of short films that are as witty, ambitious and poignantly arresting as they are mostly forgotten. "I consider film to offer potentially the widest scope to a writer as a pure form," he claimed in

a 1965 Belfast University lecture entitled 'Holes, Syllabics and the Succussions of the Intercostal and Abdominal Muscles'. However, he added, "at the moment it is still so hedged around with economic and pseudo-moral limitations that it is one of the most frustrating media to work in".

Such caveats about the British film industry were as nothing compared with the scorn he poured on its productions in one of his (anonymous) columns for *Film and Television Technician* journal in August 1971: "the goldenlichened moneylovers" who run it ensure that it produces only "stinking crap": "fatuous stories about sexless lovers, quaint old trains, action pictures which move the stomach to retch and not the heart to feel, the class-riddled setpieces of a dead culture, desperately unfunny double-entendre comedies, all forming a Victoria Falls of cesspool effluent. Only the purer waters of the British documentary tradition prevents complete pollution of the environment."

Johnson's novelistic voice comes across forcefully in this diatribe: neologisms and compound terms such as "goldenlichened" of

the sort that might be found in his beloved Joyce; his impatience with what he saw as a fossilised literary culture urgently in need of the catalytic shock of modernism; an abrasiveness that expresses itself in corporeal terms; a skein of last-gasp lyricism that does little to countermand the dominant tone of someone kicking against the pricks and raging against the dying of the light.

A member of a postwar literary club that had no name and never existed as a coherent body (The Awkward Squad? Avant Albionists?), whose members would theoretically include Wilson Harris, Christine Brooke-Rose, Ana Quinn – Johnson's experimental fictions are not only full of devices that draw attention to the materiality and conventions of the literary novel, but try in their tricky fashions to render a more convincing relationship between the truth of literature and the truth of life: *Albert Angelo* (1964) features a hole cut through two of its pages so that readers can see through to events that take place in the "future"; *The Unfortunates* (1969), inspired by a friend's early death from cancer, was issued as a box whose first and last sections



*'You're Human Like the Rest of Them'
features a schoolteacher declaiming dark
thoughts about mortality.*

are separated by 25 pamphlets, some a mere paragraph long, that can be read in any order.

Give or take the occasional ICA or National Film Theatre retrospective, over the last decades, the only way to find out whether Johnson's films were as ludic was via the grey economy of time-coded bootlegs and wobbly off-TV videos. Now, after years of advocacy by his admirers, preeminent among them novelist Jonathan Coe who wrote an excellent biography called *Like a Fiery Elephant* (2004), the British Film Institute has bundled together a generous selection of his output; its quality ranges, but its earthy modernism and spirit of truculent affirmation are consistently bracing.

His filmmaking career began with a bang with *You're Human Like the Rest of Them* (1967), a decasyllabic adaptation of his own verse-drama featuring a schoolteacher declaiming dark thoughts about mortality. It won the Grand Prix at the Tours Short Film Festival where, he later recalled, Jacques Tati "kept hitting me hard behind the ear with his open hand and saying 'You are 'appy?!' Three times he did that, it's my one coherent memory of the evening, perhaps because it hurt each time."

By contrast, when Johnson's *Paradigm* (1969) was screened at Oberhausen, jury head Walerian Borowczyk described it as the worst short film he'd ever seen. It begins with William Hoyland sitting naked and youthful in a white studio, nattering away buoyantly in a mysterious language that could be Esperanto, Joycean glossalia or mere gobbledygook. As time passes he dons more clothes, ages conspicuously, and speaks – still in an inexplicable argot – with anguish. By the end he's mutely contorted.

Apparently conceived as a paradigm of the writer's condition – early logorrhoea followed by parched, melancholic maturity – the film is accompanied by a shrill electronic tone that wouldn't be out of place at a contemporary noise-music festival. John Furse's art direction is attractive and it's hard to take one's eyes off Hoyland, who apparently memorised Johnson's completely made-up language. If the young David Bowie had starred in it, it would be regarded as a fascinating period piece, an odd but rewarding slice of performance art.

Two lesser-known works – *Unfair!* (1970) and *March!* (1971) – were didactic responses to the Conservative government's industrial relations bill that sought to curb the power of the trade unions. The former stars Bill Owen (Compo from long-running BBC sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine*) as a cap-wearing prole engaged in an arm-wrestling bout with a representative of the toffee-nosed establishment. This is punctuated by shots of them having a slo-mo boxing match and slogans such as 'More working days lost through bronchitis than strikes'. It's knock-about agitprop in the vein of leftist street theatre or Bash Street Kids creator Leo Baxendale's anarchist comics.

March!, made for the TUC, documents a mass protest held in London against the bill. It's high on 'NALGO Says No' banners, shots of associations such as the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Free Communication Group, as well as rousing



William Hoyland in 'Paradigm' (1969)

orchestral music to insist that the future belongs to the workers. What's lacking in both films, perhaps through deference to the TUC, is any attempt to extend the grammar of this kind of political bulletin. Unlike, say, Jean-Luc Godard's *British Sounds* (1970), the militancy of their politics doesn't extend to their image-making. *March!* has a couple of shots of younger, dancing protestors, but it's clear, as one procession of middle-aged men follows another, that Johnson has little interest in exploring or linking to broader forms of countercultural activism.

It's a shame that *The Smithsons on Housing* (1970), a portrait of New Brutalist architects Alison and Peter Smithson, perhaps the most inadvertently unflattering biographical documentary ever broadcast in Britain, isn't included in the DVD package. But *Not Counting The Savages* (1972), a long-presumed-lost *Thirty-Minute Theatre* production directed by Mike Newell is here in all its scabrous darkness. So is *B.S. Johnson on Dr. Samuel Johnson* (1971), made for ITV's *On Reflection* series, a terrifically ebullient meditation on his 18th-century namesake, in which he declares: "Drinking is an occupational

*The collection's quality ranges
but its earthy modernism and
spirit of truculent affirmation
are consistently bracing*



Unfair! (1970)

hazard for writers, rather like coal dust is for miners. There's a very important correlation between the flow of thoughts on to paper and the flow of drink into a writer, so much so that it might be officially recognised and drink could be made available on the National Health Service – or perhaps through the Arts Council."

Best of all is the eccentric essay film *Fat Man on a Beach* (1974), directed by Michael Bakewell and rather unbelievably broadcast on HTV Wales. It's an intensely personal film – full of youthful memories and speculations on mortality – that is by turns antic and hectoring, eager to expose its formal mechanisms (jump cuts, he says, are "little deceits of filmmakers"), and a manifesto that doubles as an aesthetic credo ("Why can't a film be a celebration of the accidental? Do you have to be a told a story? Telling stories is a child's euphemism for telling lies.")

At times, Johnson can be rather bumptious – coming across like *The Office*'s David Brent if he'd just written a term paper on *Tristram Shandy* – and it's amusing to read in Bakewell's DVD-booklet essay that youngsters who lived near the bay of Port Ceiriad in Gwynedd where it was shot weren't impressed by the film team from London: "It was not until we were shooting the helicopter sequences which began and ended the film that they voiced their feelings. There on a neighbouring stretch of beach, scrawled in large letters in the sand below us was an ominous warning, 'Down with pompous fannies...' (or something to that effect!)"

Johnson committed suicide a fortnight after *Fat Man on a Beach* was completed and it's hard not to watch the final shot of him walking into the sea without thinking it somewhat premonitory. It's hard too not to wonder what kind of films he might have gone on to make. His girth, ebullience and sharp intelligence – to say nothing about his interest in architecture – anticipate the TV work of Jonathan Meades. His medium-deconstructing tendencies prefigure *The Paul Morley Show* on Channel 4. The personality-driven commissioning of modern networks might have led him to become a caricature of himself. But that seems unlikely: Johnson, as this package triumphantly shows, was always too bolshy, too unvarnished for that dismal fate. ☹



B.S. Johnson

New releases

ALOIS NEBEL

Tomáš Lunák; Czech Republic 2011; Kimstim/Zeitgeist/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

What we've got here is a thoroughly modern wonder, a new, hi-tech-yet-old-fashioned art-film humdinger that appears to be, by almost universal industry agreement, unreleasable to theatres. (Outside its home region, the Czech Republic, only distributors in France and Russia have gambled on it.) This suggests more about the current nerveless state of film culture and marketing than anything about the film itself, which is a startlingly original, impressionistic, black-and-white animation, not in the familiar Svankmajer stop-motion mode but a black-hearted, shadow-moody rotoscoped Cold War rumination, adapted from the Czech Republic's first graphic novel. Tomáš Lunák's feature debut did win a Best Animation trophy at the European Film Awards last year, and it's an evocative mini-masterpiece, brimming with subjective atmospherics and brooding menace and capturing the sensuous experience of a particular place and time – a remote train depot in the Jeseník Mountains in the late 1980s – in a way that feels, sensibly enough, more poetic than photographic.

The amorphous, slippery plotline centres on a nearly mute middle-aged station agent (Miroslav Krobot), his invasive memories of the Holocaust and of the Germans' expulsion by the communists at war's end, and his eventual mental breakdown and hospitalisation, all of it rhyming mysteriously with a stranger illegally crossing the Polish border in the middle of the night. But Lunák's movie is constituted mostly out of visionary moments, suggestive shadow, dark-dreamy connections and historical pain, and a propulsive narrative is never needed to keep your eyeballs glued to the hypnotic surfaces or to make the resonances of history palpable. Reports of the Berlin Wall falling are heard on the station radio, but every shot in the film looks backward, into the 20th century's darkness.

Lunák uses the same computer rotoscoping program that Richard Linklater used in *Waking Life* (2001) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), but his style is more singular and stylised, taking disarming advantage of that ambiguous, puzzling region between the 'real' and graphic characterisation. The film's consistent plastic



Home truths: 'Le Beau Serge'

bewitchment comes directly from the no-man's-land between mustering the natural and being abstracted with expressionist dread, to the extent that the visuals become a kind of metaphor for the haunted disconnect of late communist life. Certainly, it's one of the most powerful movies ever made 'about' the darkness of the European forest, which can be said to be substantially darker since 1936. It's a film that deserves to be widely seen – and would have been just a few decades ago.

Disc: Perfect. Sadly, no supplements, though only Lunák's early animated shorts might've been appropriate – a making-of doc's revelations would've pulled the curtain on the artifice.

BAISE-MOI

Virginie Despentes/Coralie Trinh Thi; France 2000; Arrow/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 74 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.66:1 anamorphic; Features: making-of, trailer, directors' Q&A

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Fuck, we're useless. Where are the witty lines?" complain Manu (Raffaëla Anderson) and Nadine (Karen Bach) partway through the nihilistic killing spree that occupies most of their waking lives. This could be an in-joke by the film's neophyte directors, aware of their limitations, but it also powerfully conveys the sense that as working-class women at the bottom of the social ladder, Manu and Nadine will never be cool or self-possessed enough to become authentically mythologised.

Narratively, *Baise-moi* runs along broadly similar lines to *Ms.45* (1981) and *Thelma & Louise* (1991), but it's a fair bit more complicated (or confused) in its sexual politics. Although Manu is raped at the start, her response is one of contemptuous indifference: she doesn't fear her rapist, but utterly despises him. While Manu and Nadine go on to murder the vast majority of their sexual partners like tooled-up praying mantises, this isn't a hard-and-fast rule, and neither are their victims invariably male. When they pick up a couple of young men and enthusiastically shag them senseless, they part on entirely amicable terms. However, when another insists on using a condom, they treat it as a personal insult, with fatal consequences.

Shot on a tiny budget, the film is deliberately rough-edged and grungy, as though Manu and Nadine were being stalked by a camcorder-toting accomplice. Indeed, they seem aware of the camera at times, striking poses that crudely mimic the iconography of far glossier exploitation flicks – and there are also nods to the porn backgrounds of both leads and co-director Coralie Trinh Thi in the sex scenes being decidedly unsimulated. If *Baise-moi* ultimately bites off rather more than it's able to chew (source novelist and co-director Virginie Despentes has been much more coherently provocative on paper), it stands up surprisingly well 13 years on – a sobering reflection of the fact that the dehumanising misogyny against which Manu and Nadine are trying to rebel is just as prevalent today.

Disc: The film was shot on poorly lit standard-definition video, so a Blu-ray would have been pointless. However, this improves on Universal's 2002 release by presenting it both uncut and correctly framed, while retaining

all its extras: a substantial 40-minute 'making of' (which segues into a 'censoring of', as much of it covers the film's post-release treatment) and a Q&A following a British screening.

FILMS BY CLAUDE CHABROL

LE BEAU SERGE

France 1958; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B

Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 99 minutes;

Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: trailer, Chabrol's 1962

short 'L'Avarice'; documentary 'Claude Chabrol

Launches the New Wave: Part 1'; essay booklet

LES COUSINS

France 1959; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B

Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate TBC; 109 minutes;

Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: trailer, Chabrol's 1964 short

'L'Homme qui vendit la Tour Eiffel'; documentary 'Claude

Chabrol Launches the New Wave: Part 2'; essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Technically the first film of the *nouvelle vague*, *Le Beau Serge*, Chabrol's dark moral fable in which Jean-Claude Brialy's educated returner determines to rescue his drunken buddy (Gérard Blain) from village life, was catnip to critics if not audiences. Praised for its use of non-professional actors, for DP Henri Decaë's natural-light monochrome realism, and above all for Chabrol's personal vision, it was famously innovative. Fascinating, then, to discover in the documentary accompanying it here that it was originally conceived to catch Rossellini's eye for a slate of 16mm films (which may explain its marked neorealist traits, its wrestling with Catholicism, and its Christ figure) but failed to find favour. Still, Chabrol's first excoriating look at provincial life retains an intensely personal imprint – filmed in his boyhood village, it's shot through with autobiographical elements, and that raw, distinctive look was gained by ignoring every suggestion the production's official 'adviser' mooted.

For a film about judging others, it's nimbly ambivalent, swinging our sympathies between the self-destructive Serge and the priggish François right down to the last gloriously open shot, equally redolent of either redemption or contempt. The only point that feels less than thrillingly novel is the typically New Wave display of distinctly old-guard gender politics, played out in the madonna/whore figures of Serge's pregnant wife (unsuitably identified with the earthy trap of village life) and Bernadette Lafont's sluttish teenager, whose incest-rape reduces her to a blank-eyed plot device.

Le Beau Serge is, *au fond*, a male romance, its fascination with the dynamics of two conflicting characters and the Hitchcockian idea of the double carrying over neatly into Chabrol's next film. *Les Cousins*, a Balzac-style tale of Parisian corruption extinguishing a naive young provincial, is *Le Beau Serge*'s evil twin. Brialy and Blain even swap roles, Brialy peacocking as the manipulative, mannered Paul. (His character owes a great deal to the film's flamboyant screenwriter Paul Gégau, who once attended a 'come as the job you wish you'd done' party dressed as an SS officer.) But it's Blain's Charles, eyes bright with appetite and then increasingly dulled by misery, who pins you to the drama. Although Chabrol's "morbid

SAUCE MATERIAL

For too long neglected or scorned, the erotic films of Radley Metzger are full of high style and sly humour

FILMS BY RADLEY METZGER

CAMILLE 2000

USA/Italy 1969; Arrow Films/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 131 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: commentary, featurettes ('On the Set', 'Silvana's Bare Striptease', 'Cube Love Scene'), multiple trailers, booklet

THE LICKERISH QUARTET

USA/Italy 1970; Arrow Films/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 88 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: commentary, 'making of', featurettes ('Cool Version Love Scenes', 'Giving Voice to the Quartet'), multiple trailers, booklet

SCORE

USA 1972; Arrow Films/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 85 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1; Features: commentary, 'making of', 'Keeping Score with Lynn Lowry' featurette, multiple trailers, booklet

Reviewed by David Thompson

Given his shameful neglect in most published film guides and dictionaries, this is a welcome issue of new HD transfers of three films by Radley Metzger, only two of which were ever shown in the UK and which have been unavailable for decades. After beginning his directorial career in 1961 with a resounding flop (*Dark Odyssey*, a crime drama shot on location in his home territory of New York City) and moving successfully into distribution, Metzger saw that his future lay in choosing either horror or eroticism. These well-produced discs demonstrate that, in spite of all the prejudices surrounding the latter genre, within it Metzger aimed to make films with style, sophistication and sly humour, and mostly passed with distinction.

For one thing, Metzger's cinema is the polar opposite of his contemporary 'skin-flick' specialist Russ Meyer. Speaking on the phone from New York, the long-retired octogenarian confirms this, while acknowledging that Meyer's first film, *The Immoral Mr Teas* (1959), "dealt a death blow to censorship in this country". Metzger's inspiration was less *Playboy* magazine than the great wave of European cinema of the late 50s and early 60s – something he experienced in close-up while cutting trailers for the arthouse distributor Janus Films (which has now morphed into the Criterion Collection). "Actually to hold in my hand a print of *L'avventura* or an Ingmar Bergman film was thrilling, and I think maybe something bled off through osmosis, just handling all those films." There's no question that the European high society Metzger loved to depict in his films has a direct link with the participants in those *soigné* parties in *La dolce vita* (1960) and *La notte* (1961). While making his films primarily for the US market, Metzger shot them in European locations – Germany, Italy, France – with European crews and actors, and then dubbed them into English



The adult movie grows up: 'Camille 2000', Metzger's update of 'The Lady of the Camellias'

to a standard generally superior to what was often perpetrated at the time. "I always felt I made the films twice, once when I shot them and then again when I synchronised them."

As for their erotic content, both *Camille 2000* (1969) and *The Lickerish Quartet* (1970) may seem mild stuff today, but it will soon become clear to any viewer that Metzger's interests lay beyond mere titillation. *Camille 2000* is an updating of *The Lady of the Camellias*, the same story of the doomed courtesan that inspired Verdi's opera *La traviata* and the 1936 Garbo vehicle *Camille*. *The Lickerish Quartet* was a drama of sexual therapy cooked up by Metzger and his writer Michael DeForrest, which played with the unreality of film through a series of visual games and puzzles à la Alain Resnais. The costume and production design of both films, outlandish in colours and concept, was the work of Enrico Sabbatini, whose credits run from *Candy* (1968) to *The Mission* (1986). "Sabbatini was the superstar!" says Metzger. "It was just like any love affair, when your thinking synchronises with somebody, and we worked really well together." *Camille 2000* also boasts fine photography from Ennio Guarnieri and a brilliantly intense 'lounge' score by Piero Piccioni.

When hardcore sex films began dominating the exploitation market in the US (*Deep Throat* was released in 1972), Metzger adopted what he calls his "nom de fuck", Henry Paris, and made five movies with more explicit content. Though he now sighs that he "didn't have the availability of the talent for the complicated stuff I wrote", the films nevertheless stand high above practically everything else produced in

Metzger's inspiration was less 'Playboy' magazine than the great wave of European cinema of the late 50s and early 60s

the genre, with *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) often cited as the finest 'adult' movie of all time. It's recently been given the deluxe Blu-ray treatment in the US, as has 1975's *The Image*, arguably Metzger's greatest – and toughest – film, based on the S&M novel by one Jean de Berg, in fact a pseudonym for Catherine Robbe-Grillet.

Score signalled Metzger's capitulation to these shifting goalposts in erotic cinema in the 1970s. The script closely follows an off-Broadway play by Jerry Douglas which exploited the new freedom on the stage established by Kenneth Tynan's revue *Oh! Calcutta!* and focused on a bisexual couple's plan to bed a more innocent 'straight' pair, the twist being their sole interest in their own sex. "I thought it was an almost perfect representation of seduction, and the fact that seduction is not gender-based," Metzger relocated the film from a Queens apartment to the coast of Yugoslavia, and through his imaginative use of the camera deftly avoided any sense of it looking like a 'filmed play'. The cast includes the remarkable Lynn Lowry (the off-centre attraction in Cronenberg's *Shivers*) and two male actors already part of the gay porn scene. At the end of shooting, they encouraged Metzger to film real sex acts between them.

Audiences at the time rejected what *Score*'s poster cited as the "bisexual chic phenomenon", preferring the sleazier, totally heterosexual hardcore on offer elsewhere. Metzger created a version of *Score* without the 'hard' elements, and it is this that appears on the UK release, as the BBFC has rejected the original as a 'sex work' – an extraordinary decision at a time when *Baise-moi* and the films of Peter de Rome have just been passed uncut. Metzger takes a sanguine view. "I think it was Georges Simenon who said that you should be able to take the last page off a murder mystery and not hinder the reader's enjoyment. If your pleasure in *Score* depends on those few minutes of explicit oral activity, then I don't think you're going to enjoy it anyway." ☺

New releases



picture of the younger generation" shocked *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther and others with its carefully choreographed 'orgy' scenes, these are dotted with what seems to our jaded eyes like juvenile, bourgeois-baiting decadence. However, 'le style Chabrol' emerges deliciously full-blown here, the fluid, considered camerawork full of unusual angles that make every shot a short story. Charles becomes a trapped animal, tortured by the carousing lovers visible through the glass shower of his cousin's apartment, or the raucous party shadowed on his bedroom wall. Cynical where *Le Beau Serge* is earnest, overdetermined against the other's pleasing naturalism, *Les Cousins* is a scintillating but brittle piece of work, albeit one whose stature as coruscating social satire remains considerable. **Discs:** Two really first-rate Gaumont restorations show off the 50 shades of grey of Decaë's cinematography and a sharp soundtrack. Pierre-Henri Gibert's hefty two-part documentary is a considerable boon, heavy with unsentimental memories from Chabrol's colleagues (Gégauff gets a particularly stiff appraisal) and archive footage of Chabrol himself, wry about his *Cahiers* colleagues – "They sulked when I praised Ford or Huston." Two Chabrol shorts, *L'Homme qui vendit la Tour Eiffel* and *L'Avarice*, are pleasing and playful additions.

CITY OF WOMEN (LA CITTA DELLE DONNE)

Federico Fellini; Italy 1980; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 139 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: documentaries ('A Dream of Women', 'Notes on City of Women'), interviews with Dante Ferretti and Tinto Brass, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Greeted with understandably mixed reviews 33 years ago, in retrospect *City of Women* (*La città delle donne*) now looks like Fellini's last great film. As he follows his protagonist-cum-alter ego Snàporaz (Marcello Mastroianni in his first substantial Fellini role since 8½ in 1963) into a Lewis Carrollian dreamworld that lays bare his deepest insecurities about the opposite sex after a decade of feminist emancipation, it's hard to miss how Fellini is *acutely* conscious of the minefield he's gingerly traversing. Indeed, when Snàporaz is spotted at a radical feminist conference that he's accidentally attending, and humiliatingly outed over the tannoy, Fellini seems to be anticipating the reaction to his own work.

Given that Snàporaz is first shown making a crude pass at an attractive pinstriped woman on a train, it's tempting to assume that this is merely a chauvinist fantasy – a reading supported by the fact that he can't help filtering all the women he subsequently meets into convenient pigeonholes: madonna, whore, dominatrix, exotic other and so on. But he also recoils from the grotesquely medallion-toting Dr Katzone (Ettore Manni) and his multimedia shrine to thousands of his sexual conquests, and the more he consciously tries to sound balanced and reasonable, the more he's mocked by people who can see right through him – notably his wife, who pops up for a mid-point heart-to-heart.

Conceptually and visually, Fellini was still firing on all creative cylinders, and *City of Women*

contains some of his most memorable ideas, ranging from the straightforwardly metaphorical (Snàporaz wobbling on roller-skates while far more confident women literally run rings around him) to the all-stops-out concoctions that pushed Cinecittà's resources to the limit, notably a rollercoaster-shaped slide which forces Snàporaz to relive his various sexual experiences from the viewpoint of older but not necessarily wiser middle age. The film may often be toe-curling, but for sheer balls-out, soul-baring courage, nothing else that Fellini did since *Amarcord* (1973) comes close to this.

Disc: An exceptionally generous package gives the film the best possible showcase, starting with a superb high-definition transfer (one of a number of Gaumont restorations that Masters of Cinema has recently acquired for the UK market) and continuing with some lengthy, fascinating documentaries and interviews, including an hour-long portrait of Fellini at work.

LA DAME DE PIQUE

Léonard Keigel; France 1965; Les Documents cinématographiques/Region 0 DVD; 78 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.77:1

Reviewed by Philip Home

The American novelist Julien Green – who lived almost entirely in France, wrote in French and became a member of the Académie française – had an interest in film which is marked by this release in the series 'Julien Green et le cinéma'. He co-wrote the script for this 1965 version of Pushkin's much adapted

uncanny short story of obsession and madness and the secret of winning at cards in a month of daily one-hour sessions with his adoptive son Eric. Eric discusses the project in an interview on this beautifully packaged DVD.

The film was directed by Léonard Keigel, who had been an assistant to René Clément. But this is writer's cinema: Eric says, rather chillingly, that "the director only had to follow the directions and the story. I don't diminish him in saying that – he had the intelligence to conform to it." Green got state funding for the film by having lunch with his friend André Malraux, the Minister of Cultural Affairs, and the production was shot in the grand, Russian-furnished Château d'Haroué in eastern France, with beautiful costumes and wigs.

The old Countess Anna Fedorovna (played by Edith Evans in Thorold Dickinson's brilliant 1949 British version) is here the charming but alas for this part rather limited Dita Parlo, best known for Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934) and Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937), making a comeback at 58 after 15 years away from cinema. The ambitious young officer Herman (Anton Walbrook in Dickinson's version) is here Michel Subor, Godard's *Petit Soldat* – but the free adaptation and expansion of Pushkin's pungent little tale ("showing some things that Pushkin had only touched on", in Eric's phrase) make it primarily a vehicle for Parlo. Eric describes the acting style as mostly "mort-vivant" – indeed there's a touch of Malraux's son-in-law's *Marienbad* in the weirdly lifeless way the group scenes are handled. The music, Schubert's great late String Quintet, is unfortunately



City of Women The film may often be toe-curling, but for sheer balls-out, soul-baring courage, nothing else Fellini did since 'Amarcord' comes close to this

overused (about a dozen times) to the point of banality. In fact, the film loses conviction as it heads for what in Pushkin is a shattering climax.

The Green and Green script is full of additional ideas, some of them interesting (a fatal curse on the men to whom the Countess tells the secret, an abundant use of mirrors and reflections, the niece Lisa's final suicide rather than marriage), but cumulatively they diffuse the emotional interest in the core of the story and feel rather self-indulgent. A sort of Mrs Danvers figure – the malignant retainer Mademoiselle Doucet (Katharina Renn) – is invented, but she mainly has the effect of draining agency (and energy) from the central figures. The dialogue is often clumsily explicit, the plotting implausible. Keigel lacks the instinct to build tension and throws away what chances the script leaves. Nonetheless, this strange film is a real curiosity – partly as a document of its moment and milieu.

Disc: A beautifully produced DVD with useful extras including a fascinating interview with Eric Green.

DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID

Jean Renoir; USA 1946; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

As close to an old-school gothic as Jean Renoir ever got, this second adaptation of the Mirbeau novel is an unavoidable companion piece/complement to Buñuel's version 18 years later, the two films forming a heavenly diptych that not only exhausts the scandalous-pulp class-warfare scenario but also elucidates how much the two masters shared and how their sensibilities fit together like a handshake.

Characteristically, Renoir's take on the saucy maid (Paulette Goddard) hired on to a luridly dysfunctional family estate in 1880s France and inciting all kinds of unrest and sexual distraction is full of human bustle, balletic camera roamings and revealing doorways; unlike Buñuel, Renoir was sympathetically dedicated to balancing every character's battery of desires, and so Francis Lederer's saturnine butler, Hurd Hatfield's oedipally vexed family scion, Burgess Meredith's loony neighbour and Judith Anderson's monarchical über-mom are all given room to gallop, and time to pursue their own conflicts.

The tension between the story's pulpy melodrama and Renoir's need to humanise everybody is fascinating (alternately, Buñuel was beguiled by the juicy Romantic stereotypes), and there are lovely gestures in a surrealist vein (the fetishistic regard for Goddard's blonde curls, etc). All told, with its air of impulsive nuttiness and bizarre psychological implications, it's quite unlike any other Hollywood film of the 40s, which may be as much Meredith's doing as Renoir's; Meredith, for a time something of a Renaissance figure in American theatre and film, also co-produced and wrote the screenplay, and his jabbering performance, as a new post-revolutionary Republican gone hopelessly mad, is in a startling class by itself. At the centre is Goddard (married to Meredith at the time), owner of the brightest eyes in Hollywood and a croaky, sardonic voice that was wasted, as she was generally, by Chaplin.



Staff relations: 'Diary of a Chambermaid'

Never quite the star she should have been, here Goddard has her one moment in the halo of a master of actors and dramatic comedy, and it's her Carole Lombard moment.

Disc: Nice archive print, no extras.

THE MURDERER LIVES AT 21

Henri-Georges Clouzot; France 1942; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 84 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: introduction by Ginette Vincendeau, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Although not unknown on this side of the Channel (it even made an unexpected BBC2 appearance in the mid-1980s), Henri-Georges Clouzot's directorial debut has been widely overlooked in favour of its immediate successor *Le Corbeau* (1943) and the masterpieces that followed. True, it's more of a jolly comedy-thriller than the grimly protracted suspenseurs with which Clouzot made his lasting reputation, but it unmistakably foreshadows his later work, with even the jokier moments undercut by a bitter and all too characteristic misanthropy.

A serial killer is on the loose, his presence established by a calling-card for 'Monsieur Durand' left on each corpse. Inspector Wens (Pierre Fresnay) and his girlfriend Mila (Suzy Delair) take on the case (unofficially in her case), quickly turn up evidence that 'Durand' lives at a boarding house at number 21 Les Mimosas, and duly take rooms there in undercover guises in the hope of catching him in the act. Naturally, virtually all of Wens's new neighbours could be Durand or have a vested interest in the continuation of his activities: struck-off abortionist Dr Linz defends them philosophically ("It's not murder, it's slaughter"); Mademoiselle Cuq is writing a thriller with a similar plot; and the illusionist Professor Lalah-Poor's already sinister stage act pulls in thrill-seeking audiences thanks to the possibility that he might have a murderous double life.

Although Clouzot relocated the action in Stanislas-André Steeman's source novel from

late-1930s London to early-1940s Paris, there's no onscreen mention of the Nazi occupation of France – but there are many nods towards its day-to-day reality, specifically the notion of death coming out of the blue and the hopelessness of the French authorities in preventing it. While the big climactic reveal won't be spoiled here, it too has a specific satirical thrust that's hard to miss. The film is startlingly racy compared with its buttoned-up English-language counterparts, not just in its innuendo-charged dialogue but also its overall sexual frankness. Like the same label's recent disinterment of Sacha Guitry's *La Poison*, it's a very welcome rediscovery.

Disc: The Blu-ray wasn't supplied for review, but even the DVD is towards the upper end of the quality scale, as one would expect from a recent Gaumont restoration.

THE RED MENACE

R.G. Springsteen; USA 1949; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 87 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Forgotten missiles out of the smoke banks of the 20th century don't come much more fascinating than this low-budget Republic flag-waver, officially the first Hollywood film to consider the creeping plague of communist infiltration on American soil. Coming six months before the popular rise of Senator Joe McCarthy and the public launch of his anti-communist initiative, this film doesn't have its propagandistic semiotics set in stone just yet, and a sense of panicky weirdness dominates at first, from the outrageous title sequence ('The Internationale' playing over a picture of a Lenin-faced octopus enveloping a US map), to the first stern narration by Los Angeles City Council member Lloyd G. Davies (!), to the first piece of drama, in which stars Robert Rockwell and Hanne Axman are driving in a car at night, fleeing some mysterious force. Stopping for gas in the desert, they instantly suspect the clueless pump clerk of being part of the unholy conspiracy hunting them down, a scenario that resonates for us now as deranged anti-Red paranoia. Which is of course the opposite of what was intended.

The feverish and rather Ed Woodian vibe tries to smooth itself out, flashing back to Rockwell's intro as a returned WWII vet scammed out of real estate and left out in the cold by the Veterans Benefits Administration – which is exactly where the Communist Party USA looks for recruits. He's picked up as though by a hawk at a city bus stop, brought to a private Party bar and seduced rather obliviously into the fold, where the Party seems to consist of maybe eight individuals, working on a Red tabloid (*The Toilers*) and holding indoctrinating classes in which the raving lessons are proudly frank about the Stalinist violence that awaits dissenters. What follows, though, as Rockwell's lunkhead negotiates the local bureaucracy (looking to get laid by a good-time girl only to be hit with a volume of Marx), is far more nuanced, as various Party members (including a black reporter) endure oedipal trials of conscience, work to gain the Politburo's unpredictable favour and suffer expulsion for thought crime – in the film's dramatic crest, a Jewish poet (Shepard

Revival

MY MY, DELILAH

In 1949, Cecil B. DeMille wowed audiences with sex, sumptuousness – and a surreptitious Bible lesson

SAMSON AND DELILAH

Cecil B. DeMille; USA 1949; Paramount/Region

1 DVD; 133 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

When the *Sunday Times Magazine* published a celebratory series on cinema in 1970, it fuelled at least one English schoolboy's nascent erotic reveries with the still from Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* that it put on the cover of 'The Epic' issue. Her hair spangled with gems and her flesh squeezed by a gold armband, Hedy Lamarr's Delilah looks down imperiously at Victor Mature's besotted Samson as she juts a golden C-cup at his Adam's apple. Samson has not yet been symbolically emasculated by losing his locks, but the conquest is otherwise complete.

Reeking of sex and lucre, the time-honoured currency of DeMille's films, the still comes from the initially romantic scene (or its publicity re-enactment) in Delilah's tent. As told in Judges 13-16, Samson is a Danite of Israel whose tribe is oppressed by the Philistines. Susceptible to Philistine women, he chooses the blonde huntress Semadar (Angela Lansbury), spurning the luscious Delilah. Bent on revenge, she seduces him and discovers the source of his army-vanquishing strength, prior to drugging him, shearing him and delivering him to her paymasters. She is often characterised as a femme fatale, but feminist critics have championed her as a proto-Mata Hari who uses her allure to entrap an enemy during wartime.

Since there are maternal elements in Samson and Delilah's relationship, his subsequent blinding carries an oedipal charge. For the narcissistic Delilah, it means he'll no longer be able to gaze on her beauty. Few of the moviegoers who made the film the box-office sensation of 1949 would have picked up on its psychological subtext, but some would have noticed that Delilah practically orgasms when she urges Samson to go "Faster, faster!" as she clings to him in a chariot. Others would have appreciated the fetishisation of the bare-midriffed Lamarr in jewels and fabrics. Bondage aficionados would have thanked DeMille for constantly restraining her beefcake co-star, prompting Delilah's lustful remark, "He's magnificent, even in chains."

Mature and Lamarr would have both turned 100 in 2013, explaining why Paramount has restored and released on DVD for the first time one of the most sought-after titles in its catalogue. Along with the completion of the overture and the restoration of the mono track, the original three-strip nitrate colour negatives were digitally scanned, the three-strip image was registered, cleaned and colour-corrected, and optical improvements were made. The

result is an iridescence, courtesy of George S. Barnes's cinematography, that surpasses the vividness of 19th-century orientalist paintings while amping up DeMille's illusionism: Edith Head's dazzling costumes, the soldiers' armour and the lion Samson wrestles are as fake as the emotions. (DeMille had a stunt double grapple with a real big cat that scared Mature.)

Although *Samson and Delilah*'s success led to the 1950s biblical epic trend and DeMille's swansong, his 1956 *Ten Commandments* remake, it is more of a chamber piece than an epic. Except for a few location sequences filmed by a second unit in North Africa and the spectacular climax in Dagon's temple, the movie is intimate: the tightly composed shots emphasise the heat between Samson and Delilah, especially during their postcoital idyll by the oasis pool, and the decadent splendour of the court of the sardonic Philistine king (George Sanders).

DeMille was a devout Episcopalian. Though frequently derided as a crass showman, he had great commercial instincts and knew that the movie's carnality and refulgence were powerful lures for audiences whom he'd treat to an inter-testamental Bible lesson. No one interested in DeMille should ignore the theological analyses of the film by Anton Karl Kozlovic,

It is more of a chamber piece than an epic... tightly composed shots emphasise the heat between Samson and Delilah

who has shown how 'CB' and his writers reinforced the Samson story by drawing on the Garden of Eden narrative and the Gospels.

Kozlovic persuasively argues, for example, that the Fall of Man is represented in the garden scene in which Delilah (a slithering plum-eating serpent) begins her tempting of Samson (Adam) in the presence of her sister Semadar (Eve), which ends with their departure (expulsion). The film also identifies Samson, a sometime shepherd and God's agent on earth, as a rustic Christ figure betrayed by Delilah (who kisses him as Judas kissed Jesus).

The virgin Miriam (Olive Deering), who loves Samson unconditionally, echoes Mary, the mother of Jesus; the courtesan Delilah's redemption at the side of Samson suggests Mary Magdalene; and the blinding of Samson equates to Jesus's faying. When Samson places himself between the pillars of the temple to bring it down, his posture replicates that of the crucified Jesus. His self-sacrifice and his destruction of the Philistines liberate the Israelites from domination, which is analogous to Jesus's salvation of mankind.

Another parallel: *Samson and Delilah*'s maker, Kozlovic enthuses, "had encapsulated the very essence of [Jesus's] own teaching strategy in his filmmaking praxis. Namely, he went to the people, spoke to them in *their* language, about *their* desires, to teach them about his ideas. If this pedagogic model was good enough for the king of kings, it ought to be enough for the king of Hollywood." DeMille may not have been that, but he certainly knew how to use sex and sumptuousness to sell religion. ☸



And... cut: Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr in the title roles in 'Samson and Delilah'

New releases

Menken) condemns the commies as “psychopathic misfits” after he’s kicked out for insisting that Marxism has Hegelian roots, and before he’s hounded to suicide.

Hegel in Hollywood! Often enough, particularly in the US and USSR, mid-century propaganda turns out to be much more sophisticated and ambivalent in its social messaging than we remember or assume, and so it is that this pioneering film is both full of unquestionable stories about poverty and inequity in America and yet maniacal about communism’s ‘moral’ taint. Confused and earnest soul-searching is the story’s default conversational gear. Certainly, the film is semi-literate about Marxism, to a degree that just one year later became virtually forbidden in movies as well as in Congress, and its hero’s bafflement about the dissonance between communist ideals and totalitarian practice is the movie’s as well. Written, directed and photographed by veterans of scores of Republic westerns, *The Red Menace* freezes a moment of transitional muddle in American life, and its pro-democracy cant has a distinctive air of questioning unease.

Disc: Fine archival print, no extras.

SWANDOWN

Andrew Köttling; UK 2012; Cornerhouse/Region O Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 12; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: ‘Glitter and Storm’, ‘Bunhill Fields’, five ‘Artefacts’ (expanded/deleted scenes), Q&A, theatrical trailer

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Swandown comes front-loaded with certain nudges to the viewer suggesting how it should be read. Its tale of two men taking a swan-shaped pedalo from coastal Hastings to Olympic Hackney via south-east England’s sleepy backwaters (literally) is set up as a collision of Dada and psychogeography: surrealist filmmaker Andrew Köttling in the company of poetic cartographer of London and its hinterlands Iain Sinclair. And it begins in uncompromising, avant-garde fashion: saturated shots of swans, sundown and glittering lens-flare, followed by Köttling and Sinclair performing a libation ceremony – dousing a plastic swan with wine and attempting to launch themselves on the sea while the waves bear them ceaselessly back to shore.

But *Swandown*’s secret is that it is in fact a classic piece of whimsy in finest English tradition. Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men in a Boat* was published in 1889; 123 years later, *Swandown* is essentially *Two Men in a Swan-Shaped Pedalo*. There is even a traditional English quality to its gentle, genial air of anticlimax. Köttling and second cameraman Nick Gordon Smith capture some lovely and startling images: the pedalo in portage from one river to the next, carried in silhouette down a hill, for instance. And Köttling, always ready to plunge, fully suited, into the greenest bilge to cut the pedalo clear of weeds and rubbish, is an admirably gonzo counterpoint to Sinclair’s rather priestly ruminations on the passing riverbanks and their deep historical connections.

But in essence very little happens beyond some light banter with passing fishermen or pedestrians and some pre-planned encounters with friends. And just as they pass the Thames



The only way is Wessex: ‘Tess’

flood barrier and a confrontation looms between Sinclair and his *bête noire*, the Olympic site, the author has to leave the film for a book tour.

Köttling’s deflation is captured perfectly by shots of him slumped disconsolately in a pedalo now listing badly without Sinclair’s counterweight.

Disc: A series of brief ‘Artefacts’ offers extended and alternate cuts of key scenes from the film. One of them features artist Dinos Chapman as a ‘pedal pal’, and one a visit to Bunhill Fields in London (burial place of Bunyan, Defoe and Blake). *Glitter and Storm*, a short film by Rebecca E. Marshall, is a fascinating series of interviews with swimmers in the sea off Hastings, the camera so sunk among the waves you can practically taste the saltwater.

TESS

Roman Polanski; France/UK 1979; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 172 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: ‘Tess: From Novel to Screen’, ‘Filming Tess’, ‘Tess: The Experience’, costume featurette, trailer, subtitles, booklet

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Roman Polanski’s epic film of Thomas Hardy’s biggest-selling novel, about a decent country girl beset by parental ambition and the advances of two irregular suitors, *Tess* surely ranks among cinema’s great labours of love. Recommended to Sharon Tate for its ideal lead role, it was filmed nine years after her death when Polanski’s career was starting to languish. Shot in northern France (handsomely doubling for Wessex) over nine months, through all seasons, the most expensive production in French cinema history was an ambitious gamble, with its Dorset dialect, a German lead and no stars. Producer Claude Berri had to mortgage his house for funds, and tragedy struck when renowned British cameraman Geoffrey Unsworth died (replaced by Ghislain Cloquet, whose scenes are marked by a telltale light falling on top of the actors’ heads). Ultimately, it paid off, and the lavish, unhurried adaptation delighted audiences and won Oscars, understandably, for photography, costumes and production design.

Ever the curious outsider, Polanski loves peering at the detail of the world closing in on Tess, and orchestrates bravura real-time scenes such as the opening shot of the village virgins heading to their club dance, or Angel Clare’s carrying of four milkmaids over a large puddle, leaving Tess, nerve-rackingly, till last. As ever, Polanski draws good performances from non-star actors, with Nastassja Kinski passive and steely by turns as Tess, and Leigh Lawson

spot-on as oily Alec d’Urberville, a big bad wolf who retains the merest trace of decency.

The Polanski touches are thrilling (a carriage ride where you fear for the actors’ safety, or sunlight blinding the lens when Tess makes a sickening discovery), but what exerts a strange hold over the viewer’s mind for days afterwards is the film’s dark sense of misfortune unfolding, as unrelenting as the seasons.

Disc: Taken from Pathé’s restoration, which premiered at Cannes in 2012, this luminous transfer does glorious justice to the photography’s striking painterly beauty and the extraordinary elegance and authenticity of Anthony Powell’s costumes and Pierre Guffroy’s sets. It also rectifies the film’s uneven sound levels, pointing up the contributions of composer Philippe Sarde (who blends pastoral, folk and nursery music to haunting effect) and John Brownjohn, who translated Polanski and Gérard Brach’s screenplay into robust Hardy-esque dialogue.

THE THIRD GIRL FROM THE LEFT

Peter Medak; USA 1973; Warner Archive/Region

1 DVD; 93 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1

Reviewed by Peter Tonguette

Fans of Kim Novak must have been taken aback when they tuned in to watch her first made-for-television movie, *The Third Girl from the Left*. The formerly winsome star of *Picnic* (1955) and *Pal Joey* (1957) had never looked as bedraggled on screen as she did here. The first shot is unforgiving: a tight close-up stays trained on her lined face as an unmade-up Novak meticulously applies concealer, false eyelashes and lipstick. The *coup de grâce* comes when she plants a gigantic wig atop her thinning blonde tresses.

It is a brave showing by Novak, and a striking beginning to an otherwise predictable effort from director Peter Medak and screenwriter Dory Previn. Novak is Gloria, a New York chorus girl long past her prime in a profession that inevitably sends its practitioners to the back line. The film is at its most pungent early on, as Gloria is made to reckon with the passage of time: her younger, more limber cast mates present her with a birthday cake, while her longtime beau Joey (Tony Curtis) is under the mistaken impression that they have been seeing each other for eight years (instead of the more ominous-sounding 13).

Unfortunately, the screenplay concocts a phony love triangle between Gloria, Joey and a delivery boy named David (Michael Brandon), who introduces Gloria to the wonders of flea markets and rock music, as though she’s been stuck in amber for the past 20 years. It is hard to accept that Joey, despite his protestations about making an honest woman of Gloria, would so casually carry on affairs behind her back, but even harder to accept that Gloria would be so easily beguiled by a guitar-strumming hippie who, if anything, has even fewer career prospects than she does.

Nonetheless, the talent of the gifted director of *The Ruling Class* and *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (both 1972) comes through in the vivid New York location shooting and an appropriately depressing psychedelic montage in which Gloria’s life – all sparkles and glitter – flashes before her tired, tired eyes.

Disc: No features.

WAKING NIGHTMARE

A seething outback-bender of a movie, steeped in self-loathing, *Wake in Fright* is *Deliverance*'s black-hearted Australian twin

WAKE IN FRIGHT

Ted Kotcheff; Australia 1971; Drafthouse Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 109 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

What quickly came to be regarded as the Australian New Wave was still in its squawking, colicky infancy when this hyperventilating bad dream emerged from the dust, sticky with sweat, cheap beer, kangaroo guts and frontier vertigo. *Wake in Fright* – which seems an oddly named movie about a joyless outback bender until you try to consider it as anything other than a horror film – has an almost legendary profile as a crystalline manifestation of some black-hearted brand of Australianness. But when you look at the nascent movement's other peak pieces of cinema – Tom Burstall's *Stork* (1971), Peter Weir's *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Fred Schepisi's *The Devil's Playground* (1976) and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), George Miller's *Mad Max* (1979), Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* (1980), etc – it's clear that the Oz notion of a national cinema came seething with queasy ambivalence, post-colonial guilt and a remarkable dose of self-loathing. The New Wave schema often involved social critique, but only *Down Under* did the reflex reach such feral intensity.

Wake in Fright may be the most scalding of the lot, and what was not overlooked by many back home in 1971 was its foreign roots, with a Canadian director (Ted Kotcheff), a Jamaican/Brit screenwriter (Evan Jones), a Norwegian/Brit producer (George Willoughby) and a Brit star (Gary Bond). Hailed by startled critics everywhere, the film predictably died at home, and was deemed so repellent (or too close to the bone, depending on where you live) that it was hardly ever broadcast on Australian TV in the ensuing years, and never appeared on home video. The inattention allowed it to decay into full-on 'lost' status, until finally in 2009 a single salvaged uncut print was fully restored and re-released.

In a sense, the film's exile from cultural consciousness fits its grotty persona far better than its recent coronation at international festivals. It is, finally, a wrenchingly odd piece of work, an alcoholic exploitation-ish morality tale with no moral message, a portrait of beer-soused ruin that could've easily, with some tweaks, emerged as a dark comedy. The hero, John Grant (Bond, looking every inch a scion of the O'Toole estate), is a bonded teacher embittered by his government debt and assignment to a single-room schoolhouse in the middle of absolutely nowhere – a point Kotcheff smacks home with the opening shot, which revolves 360 degrees and captures nothing but flat wasteland. On



Oz trial: Gary Bond (centre) as John Grant in 'Wake in Fright'

Christmas leave, Grant's plan is to train it to a nearby mining town, Bundanyabba, and then fly to Sydney for a romantic holiday, but during his layover he's plied with beer by a local sheriff (Chips Rafferty) and decides to gamble his nest egg on the local bar-wager game of two-up. Instead of freeing himself from his federal bond, he loses everything and becomes trapped for the duration in 'the Yabba', dependent on a succession of sodden local man-beasts, including Donald Pleasence's unsavoury dipso wastrel, for everything from a hot meal of 'roo stew to a pissy floor on which to pass out.

It's Sartre in a sea of Aussie brew, as Grant is teased, knocked out, patronised, semi-lured by a catatonic local slattern (Sylvia Kay, Kotcheff's wife), run in circles and egged on into a bloody night-time kangaroo hunt that culminates in an act of self-debasing animal butchery. (Executed by licensed hunters, the skirmish was genuine enough to cause walkouts by some viewers.) By the final reel it seems that someone will have to die, and Grant doesn't much care who. Canadian or not, Kotcheff certainly nailed a signature Aussie vibe (or, alternatively, may've helped originate it) with a battery of fish-eyed camera muggings, howling hysteria, drunken handheld grunge, sun-charred dizziness and a permanent mood of impending doom, not

A hyperventilating bad dream, sticky with sweat, cheap beer and kangaroo guts... It's Sartre in a sea of Aussie brew

at all unlike the eponymous feeling one gets waking up hungover in an unknown place and having the vague sense that something incredibly terrible has already happened.

Civility, we're sure, could vanish at any moment – and though it doesn't quite, Kotcheff doesn't soft-pedal, using cutaway shots of mutilated kangaroo carrion to haunt the film thereafter, exploding out the already almost post-apocalyptic sense of drunkard culture. As stranger-in-a-strange-land movies go, *Wake in Fright* is connected at the hip to its American counterpart *Deliverance* (1972), and though a primitive homophobia runs through both (ironically, given Bond's thoroughly uncloseted public persona), Kotcheff's film feels pettier and therefore more brutal about its society, and more critical of its hero's weakness. Australians had decent reason to shun it, you'd think, except that now, thanks to this gorgeous polish job, it's been embraced as the nastiest of national classics. 🍷



Donald Pleasence and Gary Bond

DEAD HEAD

Rob Walker; UK 1986; BBC/Eureka Entertainment/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 191 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The 1980s was a boom time for screen conspiracy theories: *Bird of Prey*, *Edge of Darkness*, *In the Secret State* and *A Very British Coup* on television, *Defence of the Realm* and *The Whistle Blower* in the cinema. Even among all this paranoia, *Dead Head*, shown on BBC2 in 1986, was noticeably febrile; where the competition took its cue from real-life political issues (nuclear power, the Common Market, the Cold War), Howard Brenton's four-part thriller was a consciously nightmarish collision of sexual perversity and class loathing, in which the conspiracy involved a royal Jack the Ripper.

Petty thief Eddie Cass (Denis Lawson), having agreed to transport an unspecified parcel across London, discovers that it contains a woman's severed head. That's one dead head: the other is Eddie himself, braindead patriot, monarchist and Tory voter. In the frame and on the run, he zips around the country, running into a number of sinister aristocrats and spooks (the categories overlap), bedding the odd upper-class beauty, and finding out that his affection for the Establishment is not returned. The politics are broad, and after a pacy, teasing set-up, the plot is frequently lost among the picaresque action and Eddie's voiced-over philosophising; in particular, much of the third episode, in which Eddie undergoes rigorous physical preparation for the trials to come, seems to be left over from a discarded draft.

Brenton was still a controversial figure after the druid-buggering antics of his 1980 play *The Romans in Britain*, though the success of the 1985 newspaper drama *Pravda*, co-written with David Hare, had boosted his stock. These days, he is better known for his work on *Spooks*. *Dead Head* shows him at a transitional stage – theatrical gesture and agitprop politics diluted by a dawning awareness of how pleasing, and how useful, genre conventions can be.

But it has pleasures beyond its interest as a historical document: the acting is excellent, from a weaselly Lawson, a gorgeous, terrifying Lindsay Duncan (frustratingly underused as his ex-wife), Simon Callow as a camp rogue MI5 operative, and Norman Beaton as a Jamaican crook-cum-mystic. Rob Walker's production has some lovely visual touches (in the opening credits, a clockwork model of Lawson blunders into a brick wall) and some bizarre, stylish anachronisms: at one point Eddie, dressed like Dana Andrews in a late-40s noir, leaves a grotty InterCity buffet car and somehow ends up in an old-fashioned corridor carriage out of *The 39 Steps* or *The Lady Vanishes*.

HOUSE OF CARDS

Netflix; USA 2013;

Reviewed by Nick Roddick

A 'Netflix Original' – the first drama series commissioned directly by the US VOD company – *House of Cards* may not be especially original, but it certainly earns its place alongside such HBO heavyweights as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire* and *Boardwalk Empire* as grown-up entertainment. This is not altogether surprising given a reported \$100 million budget, a cast headed by Kevin

Spacey and Robin Wright, and behind-the-camera contributions from such movie-movie directors as David Fincher (who also produces) and Joel Schumacher. Indeed, the whole thing positively reeks of prestige. It also has just the right narrative momentum to encourage binge-viewing, with Netflix making all 13 episodes available at once (February 1), pointedly omitting the 'previously on...' recaps that eat up the time in other series.

House of Cards is basically an extended riff built around the political manoeuvres of Francis Underwood (Spacey), a congressman from Down South who is the chief Democrat whip and whose power rests on his ability to deliver to the president the votes he needs for certain key bills, despite the latter having broken his promise to make Underwood Secretary of State. The congressman's wife Claire (Wright), meanwhile, runs an environmental non-profit which also relies on its own kind of people-manipulation, at which she proves equally ruthless (if not always as effective). Both are having affairs – Claire with a British photographer, Adam Galloway (Ben Daniels), Francis with a lethally ambitious young reporter called Zoe Barnes (Kate Mara), who starts off with the *Washington Herald* (read *Post*) but soon defects to an online news site called Slugline. Plus there is a major subplot involving a Philadelphia congressman called Pete Russo, played by Corey Stoll, the series's most promising newcomer, previously known for having played Hemingway in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*.

And that's about it: the structure requires Underwood repeatedly to manipulate, manoeuvre, berate, backstab and even kill to get what will further consolidate his and the president's (but mainly his) hold on power – something which, as he informs us in an early aside, should never be confused with money. As Underwood, Spacey is as good as he has ever been (which is saying something), luxuriating in a Southern drawl – the rhythms of which are never quite predictable – and boundless, irresistible amorality.

The asides to camera and the starting point – a chief whip to whom the party leader has broken his word and who engages in a series of silkily executed power games – are taken from the four-part BBC series of the same name first broadcast in 1990, in turn based on a novel by Michael Dobbs. But, while the set-up may be identical and some character names recur, the subsequent plot – and above all the pace – are totally different. Indeed there are several PhD theses to be written on the way TV drama

has changed in the 23 years between the two *House of Cards*. By contrast with the Netflix version's slick cutting and relentless forward momentum, the BBC series – cutting-edge at the time but coming at the tail-end of the *Tinker, Tailor* tradition – seems slow and stagebound.

The screenplay for the new version is by Beau Willimon, who has become the go-to guy for Washington-based drama since the not-dissimilar George Clooney vehicle *The Ides of March* (2011), which was based on his play *Farragut North*. Here he offers an exemplar of the now well-established genre of political procedural, but with a rich undercurrent of Tennessee Williams-inflected language, which makes it very different from the more traditional *West Wing*. All the same, it is a closed world. Whenever *House of Cards* is safely within the Beltway, the tone of heightened realism is confidently maintained. But the same cannot be said for those scenes – in Galloway's New York loft or in blue-collar Philadelphia, or on a trouble-shooting trip by Underwood to his home base in Georgia peach country – where the non-political world is the focus.

And, for all its occasional ability to surprise – a scene where Claire visits Francis's former driver in hospital is especially memorable – *House of Cards* steers right down the middle of the 'quality' TV mainstream, with a credit sequence (time-lapse shots of Washington from dawn to dark) that harks straight back, by way of *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*, to the urtext of modern American TV drama, *The Rockford Files*. There are also distinct echoes of that 1970s classic series *Lou Grant* in the scenes involving Zoe and her (lack of) journalistic integrity.

Above all, however, *House of Cards* confirms that, given the space to develop a character over several hours of screen time, television drama is at its most powerful when it focuses on a full-scale monster. The series follows confidently and brazenly in the footsteps of *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* (before it killed off Stringer Bell), built around a larger-than-life protagonist whose energy and drive are in inverse proportion to his sense of right and wrong. It is dramatic identification as Schadenfreude: we know that there will be a comeuppance, but we'd like it to be postponed as long as possible 'cos the bad guys have all the best lines.

PHILIP MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE – SERIES 1

David Wickes Television/LWT/ITV; UK 1984; Dutch FilmWorks/Region 2 DVD; Aspect Ratio 4:3; 253 minutes

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

In 1978, while promoting his remake of *The Big Sleep*, Michael Winner defended its transposition to the UK not by citing Eady Levy incentives or cheaper labour costs but by pointing out that Chicago-born Raymond Chandler was schooled at Dulwich, where he excelled at classics. Nonetheless – or perhaps because of this – Chandler went on to become the most celebrated author of the 'poetry of violence' and created the enduring myth of Philip Marlowe, the hardboiled knight errant.

In the 1980s, writer-producer-director David Wickes revived an idea from the old Marlowe radio show, taking Chandler's



Whispering campaign: 'House of Cards'



Television

🔪 apprentice pulp fiction and injecting the eponymous PI into stories originally featuring such prototypes as Johnny DeRuse, Mallory, John Dalmás and Steve Grayce. The series was mainly British-based but exteriors were filmed in Pasadena, Santa Monica and even at the Alta Loma Terrace in Hollywood which was Marlowe's home in Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Directed affectionately by such pros as Peter Hunt, Sidney Hayers and Bryan Forbes, lovingly scored with a touch of bebop by John Cameron and prefaced with Bond-style main titles by Maurice Binder, the result is a curious but painstakingly stylish hybrid, one that can't quite escape a sense of cultural dislocation despite clear evidence of the fealty paid to the literary originals. Yet it's the transatlantic collisions of this curiously accented vision of a late-1930s Los Angeles, one populated mostly by expat yanks and British character actors (Arabella Weir turns up as a Hispanic cleaning lady), that creates a beguiling and sympathetic reflection of the author's own mixed influences.

The five episodes traverse Chandler's canon from his second story, 'Smart-Aleck Kill', to the posthumous 'The Pencil', the only bona fide Marlowe short story, which reunited him with Anne Riordan from *Farewell, My Lovely*. She was turned into a recurring character, with Kathryn Leigh Scott sparring coquettishly opposite lantern-jawed Powers Boothe, easily the toughest of onscreen Marlowes. **Disc:** Not currently available in the UK or the US, this Dutch release offers adequate transfers in the correct 4:3 ratio.

QUINCY, ME – SERIES 3

Universal/NBC; US 1977-78; Acorn Media/Region 2 DVD; 953 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Certificate 12; Features: stills gallery

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

Hollywood writer-producer-composer Glen A. Larson was nicknamed 'Glen A. Larceny' by Harlan Ellison for his quick-off-the-mark TV projects 'inspired' by recent movie hits. Thus *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) begat *Alias Smith and Jones* (1971-73), *Coogan's Bluff* (1968) became *McCloud* (1970-77), Burt Reynolds's back-to-back hits *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977) and *Hooper* (1978) spawned *BJ and the Bear* (1979-81) and *The Fall Guy* (1981-86), while *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-79) cashed in on *Star Wars* (1977). The one real exception to Larson's reactive copycat tendency in the 1970s was medical-cum-mystery show *Quincy*, starring Jack Klugman. Armed only with an unwavering moral compass and one of the finest toupees in Hollywood, 'Quince' fought the good fight against the Establishment in defence of the underdog week in, week out, touching on such topical issues as police corruption, domestic abuse and the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. When not diagnosing subdural haematomas or performing emergency tracheotomies with a biro, our hero is at his best communing with the Common Man, never more charmingly than in an extended cameo by Frank Faylen, who delivered his last onscreen performance as an old-time railroader.

Disc: The transfers are impeccable, though a few early episodes are missing the memorable opening spiel ("You are about to



Storyboard Most of the segments served as pilots for other series. 'The Traitor' became 'Mr Palfrey of Westminster', a superior bit of cloak-and-dagger

enter the most fascinating sphere of police work, the world of forensic medicine").

STORYBOARD

Thames/ITV; UK 1983-88; Network/Region 2 DVD;

569 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3;

Features: 'Singles Night'

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

One of the last ITV anthology series, this show takes its title from the practice in film and advertising of creating detailed panel drawings as proof of concept in pre-production. The title proved apt, as most of the one-hour segments served as pilots for half a dozen different series.

The most successful, by far, was Geoff McQueen's 'Woodentop', depicting the first day on the job of PC Carver, who, together with new partner June Ackland, would continue to appear in *The Bill* for the next 20 years. Other successes included 'Lytton's Diary', a Peter Bowles vehicle about a Fleet Street gossip columnist; George Markstein's 'The Traitor', which became *Mr Palfrey of Westminster*, a superior bit of Cold War cloak-and-dagger starring Alec McCowen; *King and Castle*, Ian Kennedy Martin's zesty tale of debt collectors; *Making News*, a fast-paced tale of backbiting broadcast journalism starring Bill Nighy; and *Ladies in Charge* starring Carol Royle, set just after the First World War and one of only two non-contemporary segments (the other is 'Hunted Down', a fine Dickens adaptation narrated by McCowen). Royle also starred opposite Tony Steedman in James Doran's 'Judgement Day', the best of the standalone items, in which an ambitious young lawyer has to put a veteran out to pasture.

Disc: Made entirely on video, the transfers are of a high standard throughout. Extras include

'Singles Night' (1984), made for the series but screened separately, which later served as the basis for the sitcom *Singles* (1988-91).

UTOPIA

Channel 4/Region B/2 Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD;

Certificate 18; 300 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: deleted scenes, audio commentary, featurettes

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Bravely, *Utopia* is framed wider even than the 1.85 of widescreen televisions and uses the letterboxed, windscreen-shaped space of 1970s paranoia or science-fiction cinema with much more deliberation than is usual in British TV. Writer Dennis Kelly sets up an interlocking set of plots and subplots as various innocents and guilty parties find themselves on the trail of the never-published second issue of a comic book created in an insane asylum by a since-dead mad scientist whose scheme to save the world through quiet genocide is on the point of being carried out by a sinister cabal. Among the struggling little people are the visionary's cracked-in-childhood offspring, paranoid off-the-grid dweller Jessica Hyde (Fiona O'Shaughnessy) and shuffling, raisin-munching hitman Arby (Neil Maskell).

Exceptionally violent – one of the show's themes is torture – and yet oddly poised and classical with its use of vividly coloured landscapes and eerily empty corridors as punctuation, this weaves together its threads over six episodes and builds to a finale that springs surprises and poses tough questions. It may lack the angry satire of *Edge of Darkness* or the mystic overtones of *Twin Peaks* but it adds its own postmodern, thought-through take on the choice between varying dystopias.

Disc: Deleted scenes, interviews with cast and creator and fly-on-the-wall B-roll.

CLASS ACTS

The latest volume of ITV's pivotal drama anthology turns up a host of minor treasures from the likes of Eugene O'Neill and Len Deighton

ARMCHAIR THEATRE VOLUME FOUR

ABC TV/ITV; UK 1958-66; Network DVD/Region 2
DVD; 733 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3

Reviewed by Mark Duguid

Before *Play for Today*, before *The Wednesday Play*, there was *Armchair Theatre*. ITV's most enduring and successful drama anthology (1956-1974) has long been overshadowed by its BBC rivals, but in its day its contribution to British TV drama was pivotal. Helpfully positioned in the schedule just after the ratings-topping *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Armchair Theatre* was mass viewing in the late 1950s and early 1960s. More than six million homes were tuned to Harold Pinter's *A Night Out* in the slot in 1960; it would take 30 years, reckoned Pinter, for that many to see *The Caretaker* in a theatre. And it was populist ITV, not the high-culture BBC, that first reflected the revolution in stage drama that began with 1956's *Look Back in Anger*.

The first two volumes of Network's ambitious excavation mined the years from 1968 to 1974, when *Armchair Theatre* was produced by Thames. With volume three the label turned its attention to the more vital early years at ABC, when, especially after the arrival of visionary Canadian producer Sydney Newman in 1958, *Armchair Theatre* began a journey away from classic literary and theatrical sources and towards contemporary British subjects and writers. This fourth volume is perhaps less essential than volume three – whose highlights included *A Night Out*, the landmark *Lena*, *O My Lena* and innovative sci-fi melodrama *The Man Out There* – but only just. The 12 plays here trace a fascinating evolution in British television drama, as it struggles to overcome the challenge of live studio drama and cast off its theatrical bonds in pursuit of a dynamic dramatic form suited to the small screen.

The first step in that emancipation was a more creative use of the studio itself. Directors such as Ted Kotcheff, Philip Saville and Charles Jarrott, following the lead of the BBC's Rudolph Cartier, employed artful composition, expressive close-ups, restlessly mobile cameras and rapid cross-cutting (occasionally too quick, leaving unwary crew members scrambling to get out of shot), while testing the limits of their gifted set designers. The earliest example here, an adaptation of *The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill's highly charged stage play about an escaped black American convict and one-time slave who has installed himself as a Caribbean despot, seems to catch dramatic form evolving in real time. As Brutus Jones prepares to make his escape from his newly vengeful subjects, director Kotcheff abandons the imposing palace set of the first act



Heart of darkness: Eugene O'Neill's 'Emperor Jones' tells the story of an escaped American convict

in favour of a chaotic roam around the cavernous studio space, haphazardly furnished with jungle foliage, the better to chart his protagonist's descent into his own personal heart of darkness.

There are other, less adventurous adaptations here: *The Greatest Man in the World*, a commentary on American hero-worship and the space race adapted from a James Thurber story, and two from Wilde, including a starry *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But *Armchair Theatre*'s reputation was built on original work dealing with contemporary issues. Ted Willis's *The Scent of Fear* is a claustrophobic Cold War drama centring on a desperate defector stowed away on a plane from Eastern Europe to London. In Alun Owen's *The Hard Knock* an embittered wanderer returns to his native Liverpool determined to prove the innocence of the brother who was

The 12 plays here trace a fascinating evolution in British television drama as it struggles to cast off its theatrical bonds



Len Deighton's 'Long Past Glory'

hanged for murder, but finds only unwanted memories and unpalatable truths. In Angus Wilson's *After the Show* an idealistic youth makes a chivalrous attempt to rescue his uncle's beautiful but damaged girlfriend from self-destruction. Other troubled women feature in *The Paradise Suite*, in which a Hollywood starlet goes mad with isolation in her hotel room, and in John Hopkins's intense psychodrama *I Took My Little World Away*, a provocative if not entirely satisfying exploration of swinging London's darker side, starring Susannah York.

But the series' remit embraced more than just grim social realism. Jack Rosenthal's *The Night Before the Morning After* is a typically deft wedding-night nerves comedy, while in the glorious *The Trouble With Our Ivy* a bitter neighbourly feud between rival suburban gardeners escalates into a full-scale horticultural apocalypse – proving that Ionesco-style absurdism infiltrated British TV well before Monty Python. But the surprise here is Len Deighton's *Long Past Glory*, a deceptively Beckettian discourse on England's battered nobility, with John le Mesurier and Maurice Denham as a pair of threadbare aristocrats exiled in what appears to be a section of the London sewer.

By the mid-60s the zeitgeist had been seized by *The Wednesday Play* – set up by Newman after he was poached by the BBC – where the likes of Ken Loach were deserting the studio to film on the streets. There's nothing here that quite matches the political or aesthetic impact of Loach's *Up the Junction* or *Cathy Come Home*, but plenty to restore *Armchair Theatre* to its rightful place in the story of British drama.

Network's set boasts more than acceptable transfers given the telerecorded source material, although some of the earliest works here capture the flaws of their recording as well as those of performance and production. **Ⓢ**

Books



A history of violence: the book covers the usual censorship suspects such as 'A Clockwork Orange', above, alongside less familiar cases

MAKING THE CUT

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE BBFC

Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age

Edited by Edward Lamberti, Palgrave Macmillan, 240pp, £16.99, ISBN 1844574768

Reviewed by Linda Ruth Williams

Rather like the British Secret Service, the British Board of Film Classification (formerly the British Board of Film Censors) only began to open itself up to proper public scrutiny in the 1990s. For the first time newly appointed press officers offered context for decisions previously handed down as unarguable *faits accomplis*; scholars could consult long-buried files; classification criteria were published for all to see; a website enabled public scrutiny. If the doors of the BBFC's Soho Square HQ weren't exactly thrown open as the century turned, they were at least admitting fingers of light.

Commissioned by the BBFC to mark its rooth anniversary, *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC* is certainly not bound by a sanctioned 'party line'. The very fact of a book such as this existing at all – self-authored though it might be – is evidence of a seismic shift in the board's view of itself as more transparently accountable. Past overviews range from self-penned reminiscence (BBFC Secretary John Trevelyan's *What the Censor Saw*, covering his tenure from 1958-1971); diatribes

by liberal journalists with anti-censorship axes to grind and poor access to coal-face board processes; or patchy histories penned despite closed doors and locked archives. Though Tom Dewe Mathews had some access to BBFC files, his frequently critical 1994 book *Censored* struggled with – and raged against – its cloak-and-dagger practices. *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC* is a lively attempt to initiate a fuller story. Following an authorised BBC Four documentary (*Dear Censor*) and BFI Southbank season, it thoughtfully presents current practices in the frame of past contexts as part of an ongoing debate about what audiences might want from 'their' classifiers.

While this excellent book does give some attention to censorship in the first half of the 20th century, some two-thirds of its space is dedicated to the period since 1970. Academic and journalistic analyses have tended to focus on specific post-1960s *cause célèbre* cases (such

as *The Devils*, *Straw Dogs* et al). This book gives a clearer version of the post-1960s story, including the apparent liberalisation of Trevelyan and the more fraught era from the 1970s to the 90s under the 'fiefdom' of James Ferman, which saw some relaxation but also a conservative consolidation. The contradictions here are particularly fascinating; Ferman saw himself – in Guy Osborn and Alex Sinclair's quotation – as less "a policeman of the industry than as its conscience".

But despite undoubted episodes of authoritarianism, the board's authority is shown to be constantly tested. Against the prevailing view of a bastion of patrician sovereignty is set an image of the board undermined and compromised by local and regional authorities, pressurised by US producers, often failing to please the general public and the tabloid press for being variously too liberal or too draconian. Beleaguered from without, it was also sometimes dysfunctional within. Former president Robin Duval, in his astonishingly frank account, reflects on the moment he was offered the job as Ferman's replacement: "I knew enough about the BBFC's history to recognise a poisoned chalice when it was placed before me." Through this rather modest account Duval emerges as a pivotal figure, turning the warring group ("like a badly parented family in which the older children... worked off their frustrations by taking it out on the younger ones") into a transparent and effective public body fit to the demands of 21st-century culture.

This is not to say that the task of the moment is straightforward: some areas remain consistently



'A Serbian Film'

controversial. A history of struggles over horror runs through this study. Sex and violence in combination continue to be problematic for even the R18 category. This book amply reminds us that any locally bound moral panic will quite quickly be supplanted by the next tabloid-designated 'most obscene film ever made'. Imagistic envelopes may be pushed, but there is nothing new under the censorship sun. Indeed, the changing history of social attitudes makes fools of morally absolutist examiners, who often explicitly presented themselves as social as well as moral custodians, curtailing 'dangerous' messages of protest: Robert James's comprehensive account of the period from 1928 to 1948 quotes Lord Tyrrell, president for much of the 30s and 40s, as taking pride "in observing that there is not a single film showing in London today which deals with any of the burning questions of the day". We might have come a long way from the very early days when a film could be banned for "holding up a minister of religion to ridicule" or depicting "native customs in foreign lands abhorrent to British ideas", but the board must still take account of that slippery entity, public opinion. Current director David Cooke describes difficult decisions around A

A culture might define itself through its monsters but it also does so through what it tries to hide

Serbian Film and *I Spit on Your Grave*, but lucidly elaborates on how representations of real sex have, in the last decade, been sensibly dealt with as generally unproblematic for over-18s. More recent discussions about harm (particularly in relation to children) and about extreme images suggest that many wider debates concerning affect and obscenity are crystallised through anxieties over film. Sian Barber's scrutiny of the BBFC Files covering the 1980s indicates that the shifting boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood might partly have been redefined as the board set about distinguishing what it would permit for '12', '15' and '18' – and what it would not permit at all, for anyone. The historical essays are augmented by a series of sidebars in the form of single-film case histories. Whereas elsewhere the BBFC's history has been told through notorious cases (from *Straw Dogs* to *Baise-Moi*), it is fascinating to see more mainstream, arguably prosaic cases, which perhaps give a more representative view of the routine work of the board. Some of British censorship's usual suspects are here (*A Clockwork Orange* and *9 Songs*), but so are *Battleship Potemkin* and *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*. Such distinct cases enable the book to tell the story of changing values through the censorship stories of individual films (*Potemkin* goes from being banned in 1926 to being classified PG in 1987). A culture might define itself through its monsters, but it also does so through what it tries to hide – and what it then feels liberated to reveal. **S**

BECOMING KEN RUSSELL

By Paul Sutton, Bear Claw Books, 324pp, £14, ISBN 9780957246232

Reviewed by Tim Lucas

Subtitled 'The Authorised Biography of Ken Russell, Volume One', Paul Sutton's book is the first of a proposed five-volume work, seven years in the researching and writing, to be released serially. One hopes the wait for Volume Two won't be too far off because his initial entry proves captivating indeed, limited as it may be to 'off-stage' material: Russell's childhood and young manhood, his early experiments in photography and amateur short filmmaking (including *Peepshow* and *Amelia and the Angel*), and finally the seven films he made for the BBC in 1959, his first year as a professional. It is a tribute to Sutton's love for his subject that he is able to write so vividly and persuasively about work one likely hasn't seen, completing it in a sense for readers and presenting it to them, both as a project and as an object for critical appreciation and assessment. It is likewise a tribute to Sutton's critical eye, and his abilities as a writer, that this volume seldom occupies only one plane of time; if an early work incorporates an idea that will later blossom more fully in a better-known work, Sutton acknowledges this, and occasionally the work in hand will lead him back to something Russell once told him in interview, or that one of Russell's colleagues shared with him on tape or in correspondence.

Sutton's title recalls that of a similar book, Paul M. Jensen's *Hitchcock Becomes Hitchcock: The British Years* (2000), which charted how that director's early work developed into a distinctive style telegraphed by his name alone. *Becoming Ken Russell* is also about a shy and somewhat reclusive individual's indulgence of his own fantasy life through music and dance (at the age of 12, he was caught dancing naked around his empty house to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* by his returning mother, who allegedly didn't bat an eye), and his later gradual discovery of his own artistic confidence through the personalities and opportunities that life and

work presented to him circumstantially. Unlike most directors who find their way to cinema through literature or other films, Russell was activated by classical music, which made him want to share those emotions he felt; though he had been a lifelong film buff, it was only the realisation of his skill as a still photographer that made him realise that films might be the way to go about it. While carefully dodging some anecdotes related elsewhere by Russell (like his horrified reaction to an early British horror picture called *The Secret of the Loch*), Sutton meticulously chronicles Russell's step-by-step discovery of cinema from the serials of his youth to his teenage revels in rented copies of *Battleship Potemkin* and other film clubbery, culminating in his discovery of Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes*, which single-handedly proved to him that the sort of high-coloured films he dreamed about could be – indeed had been – made in Britain. An encouraging letter from Powell himself proved one of the more helpful incentives to set him on the path to his working future.

Sutton's descriptions and pocket histories of Russell's historic work for the BBC programme *Monitor* do the valuable work of placing these not only in the chronology of Russell's artistic development but in the context of British cinema itself, assembling a compelling plea for the BBC to definitively organise and preserve this material and make it more widely accessible. But in some ways the book's most fascinating passages cover Russell's work as a fine-art photographer, which is not ideally presented but is at least offered in thumbnail, allowing the reader to see that Sutton is not overselling its importance as a decisive step away from kitchen-sink realism in the direction of pop art.

Surprisingly, but also pleasingly, Sutton shies away from the armchair psychology one might expect. Instead, he adheres closely to stories shared with him by his subject and his colleagues, to documentation providing illustration of the young Russell's thought processes (like the fascinating list of the eight points he knew he must encompass in a short about the guitar, which includes Elvis Presley, the Salvation Army and Joaquín Rodrigo), and to – as he sometimes openly allows – the likely invention of legend. When the book reaches its end, it does so with an episode that could only have been shared with the author by Russell, as the young director returns home after a long day and feels seized by the desire to hear *The Rite of Spring* again, but hesitates because he doesn't want to wake his children or do the music the injustice of playing it at too low a volume. So he finds the nearest date on his calendar when he will be home, and when he will likely be alone to summon its full concert-hall authority. It's a lovely moment of intimacy, bordering on psychology, but also poetically descriptive of the story yet to come: the career of an artist who cherished innocence and the hearth of home, who was always measuring art's ability to inform and disrupt it, and vigilant for those sacred and soul-nourishing moments when all one can do is show art the respect of allowing it to let rip at full blast. **S**



Portrait of the artist as a young man: Ken Russell

LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT

By Marie Coolidge-Rask, The Imaginary Book Co, 200pp, €40

Reviewed by Jane Giles

A 1920s pulp novelisation is the sort of book you'd expect to find with a cracked cover at a collectors' fair rather than republished in a tactile, tantalisingly limited hardback edition. Described by Jonathan Coe as "that bastard, misshapen offspring of the cinema and the written word", the novelisation has rarely been taken seriously. But like film adaptations of books and plays, novelisations have existed since the early years of cinema, satisfying fans' desire to relive the movie and go deeper into the story. Marie Coolidge-Rask was a hack journalist formerly of the Pittsburgh Press and author of film novelisations including King Vidor's *La Bohème*. Her version of *London After Midnight* (1927) for US photoplay-edition publisher Grosset & Dunlap was based on the first draft of Waldemar Young's script, not on Tod Browning's finished film.

Unable to obtain the rights to adapt Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* or the 1924 stage play version, Browning wrote an original story, *The Hypnotist*. It retained enough gothic iconography to satisfy fans of the new vampire genre, but was also cloaked in the studio-friendly mechanism of the detective genre, popularised by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. Browning therefore avoided the fate of F.W. Murnau, who was sued by Stoker's widow for his unauthorised 1921 version, *Nosferatu*. Among the haunted houses, cobwebbed rooms, howling wolves and swirling mists, Coolidge-Rask developed the family melodrama as the framework for her novel. Lonely widower Roger Balfour has committed suicide, leaving his two young children, Harry and Lucy, to be adopted by his friend and neighbour Sir James Hamlin. Balfour House is left empty, to rot. The children's future seems assured, but five years later, after an argument about the renovation of the property, Harry is found dead with small wounds in his throat. An investigation begins as strange tenants move into the decrepit Balfour House and Lucy can hear her name being called from beyond the trees...

Coolidge-Rask introduces not so much a sense of colour and life – this remains a black-and-white tale of the undead – as a great deal of atmospheric sound into the memory of what would have been a silent film accompanied only by a small orchestra or lone pianist. The pages reverberate with dialogue, much of it colloquially written, howling banshees, screaming maids and the clatter of a black cat knocking over saucepans in the kitchen chaos of a household descending into panic. While the author goes to town with the tropes of gothic horror and revels in themes of drug addiction and alcoholism that would not have pleased the censors, her representation of the subplot of paedophilia is no stronger than in Young's script, despite its pot-boiling potential for the book. However, Coolidge-Rask does amplify the esoteric central character of Colonel Yates, an occult expert recently returned from India with a head full of ancient beliefs and a fistful of charms. While the shooting script is clear about the true identity of Colonel Yates, in the novel this is only



A ghost of a film: Lon Chaney and Marceline Day in 'London After Midnight', now lost

revealed at the end, along with the secret of the ghostly vampire. It's likely that even if Browning had initially conceived wildly different triple roles for 'man of a thousand faces' Lon Chaney, this had proved too confusing for what would become a slender film of just 65 minutes long.

The destruction of *London After Midnight* in the MGM archive fire of 1967 meant the loss of Hollywood's first vampire movie and a key film in the trajectory of one of cinema's most fascinating creative partnerships. Browning and Chaney made ten films together, including *The Unholy Three* (a silent version in 1925, remade as Chaney's only sound film in 1930) and *The Unknown* (1927). After the fire, all that remained of *London After Midnight* were the production stills, and to mark

The destruction of 'London After Midnight' in the MGM archive fire of 1967 meant the loss of Hollywood's first vampire movie

the film's 75th anniversary, film preservationist Rick Schmidlin produced a 45-minute long photo-film based on nearly 200 images edited according to the original continuity script. The result leaves the viewer with the impression that the real story lies elsewhere, in what cannot be seen. Coolidge-Rask's novelisation not only provides this missing link by bringing the film of *London After Midnight* back to life in the reader's imagination but is also a pleasure in its own right, a crisp murder mystery redolent of Kate Summerscale's *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*.

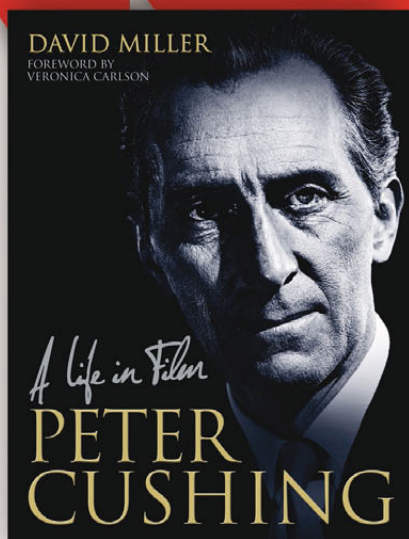
A hybrid of the British and American versions of Coolidge-Rask's text, this lavish new edition features 15 pages of tobacco-tinted stills, the original editor's note and a new introduction that reveals that Chaney's portrayal of the vampire was credited with inspiring a real-life murder in Hyde Park in 1928. With some poignancy, the book also includes the *Times* obituary of Chaney, who died of throat cancer in 1930 – just as Browning was about to be hired by Universal to direct the first authorised adaptation of *Dracula*. ☹

Read



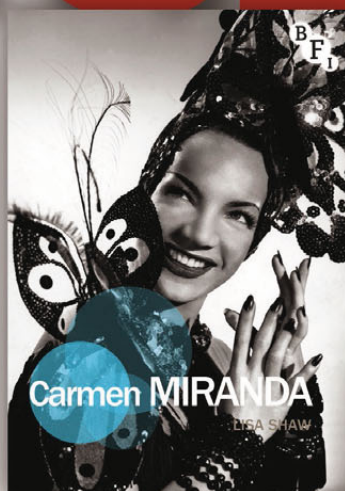
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PETER CUSHING: A LIFE IN FILM

By David Miller, Titan Books, 208pp, hardback, illustrated, £18.99, ISBN 9781781162743
From *Dracula* to *Star Wars* and beyond, Peter Cushing was an unforgettable presence in cult cinema of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. He remains, 100 years after his birth, one of Britain's best-loved film stars. Author David Miller has written a definitive guide to the stage and screen career of a legendary star, drawing on conversations with Cushing's friends and colleagues, archive material held by the BBC and Hammer Film Productions, and previously unpublished correspondence with Cushing himself. "Films, stage and television... it's all covered in David Miller's excellent companion which details Cushing's 60-year career." – *Total Film*
www.titanbooks.com



CARMEN MIRANDA

By Lisa Shaw, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 168pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574322
Lisa Shaw explores Miranda's emergence as one of the first stars of the Brazilian film industry and her subsequent triumph in Hollywood. She looks at how Miranda's star identity changed after her move to Broadway in 1939, and then to Hollywood a year later, with her identification as an 'ethnic' star emphasised by extravagant *baiana* costumes. Shaw shows how Miranda consciously constructed an identity that both endorsed and subverted stereotypes about Latin America during the era of the 'Good Neighbor Policy', and explores Miranda's appeal across mainstream and marginalised audiences, both in the US and Brazil. Finally, she explores Miranda's impact on material culture, particularly women's fashion.
www.palgrave.com/bfi



BRIGITTE BARDOT

By Ginette Vincendeau, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 184pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574926
Ginette Vincendeau explores Bardot's image of femininity, her film career and her lasting and controversial celebrity status. Exploring the star's work – including popular comedies and melodramas, work with New Wave directors Louis Malle and Jean-Luc Godard, and international productions such as *Dear Brigitte* (1965) and *Shalako* (1968) – Vincendeau shows how Bardot's enduring fame is based on her status as a sexual, lifestyle, musical and fashion role model, and as an icon of French national identity. Finally, she considers the ageing Bardot's continued prominence in popular culture, arguing that, as well as a glamorous film star, Bardot was one of the inventors of modern celebrity.
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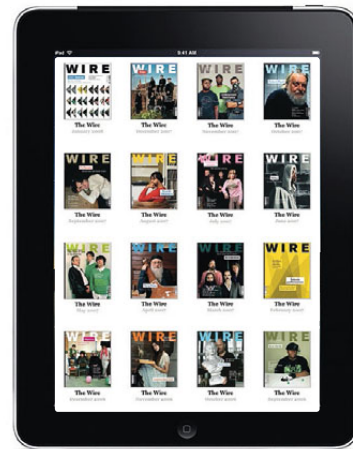
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BREATHLESS



Jim McBride's steamy, overblown ode to love on the run is a mainline to the preoccupations of 1980s rebellion – and impeccably dressed

By Adrian Martin

You've got to hand it to Raymond Bellour. Those who haven't read much of his work since circa 1976 dismiss him as a fearsome, impenetrable semiologist/narratologist; but he is a dab hand at poetic phrases that encapsulate the cinema-viewing experience. Back in the 1970s he evoked "that unreal real we call film". More recently, he has elaborated an argument about the importance of watching films under properly pre-digital projection conditions, declaring that movies crucially "offer an irreducibly singular configuration, in which the singularities of space intersect with the fatalities of time".

However I must confess that, although I did have my virgin experience of Jim McBride's masterpiece *Breathless* (1983) in 35mm, I don't really care how I re-watch it today: on a TV screen, on YouTube, or just replayed over and over as a memory in my head (which is, finally, the only "unreal real" that matters); because, no matter how it gets projected, those singularities and fatalities stay firm.

Every cut, every movement, every word – every musical note – in the final 90 seconds of this film is mine forever. A sudden close-up of Monica (Valérie Kaprisky) running, shouting, "Jesse, I love you, Jesse!" The man himself (played by Richard Gere, outrageously overdressed at all times), caught in the middle of the street: cops behind him, his girl (who has just betrayed him) in front and a criminal connection speeding away after throwing him a gun as his last hope

of survival. It's the end of the line for Jesse after a louche life of reckless, opportunistic crime – perhaps the only way he could manage to stay a teenager for all his days and nights.

So now, at the end, trapped and doomed, what does Jesse do? Suddenly, ridiculously, sublimely, he sings and dances to his favourite track: Jerry Lee Lewis's 'Breathless', of course. He creates a little bubble of fantasy right around himself, with cinematographer Richard H. Kline's telephoto lens flattening and encasing him in this magical sphere. The piano rocks on... until suddenly the track is snatched away and another (which has been bubbling away all along, down in the mix) remains: a rearrangement of Philip Glass keyboard arpeggios, topped by a melancholic accordion.

Jesse holds out his arms and trembling hands to Monica like a bridge, a tunnel, and she runs toward him, magnetically pulled: the singularities of space, dynamised and electrified in a superb *mise en scène*. But here come the fatalities of time: Jesse's song reaches its final exclamation ("you, you leave me..."), he looks down at the gun on the ground between his legs, utters (in three syllables across three rapidly cut shots, his arms air-guitaring a 'power chord') "breathless, ah" – and then makes his final gesture. You'll have to see the film yourself to discover it. Let us merely say that it is an 'open', but definitely satisfying, closure. And also one of cinema's greatest freeze-frames.

The movie that precedes this finale is one great spurt of energy – a "last chance power drive", as

Comic books, rock 'n' roll, film noir, LA beach culture: all is blended into this ode to physical release and ecstatic emotion

Springsteen once sang. McBride, who once frankly declared that he likes "to get some skin up there on screen", dishes up dizzyingly erotic scenes between his stars and floods the soundtrack with everything from Elvis's 'Suspicious Minds' to The Pretenders' 'Message of Love'. Comic books, rock 'n' roll, street murals, dance parties, the classic *film noir* *Gun Crazy* (1949), Los Angeles beach culture: all is blended into this ode to physical release and ecstatic emotion. There is an army of depressingly staid, joyless cops, bureaucrats and corporate types constantly passing through the plot, but the lovers remain gloriously free-and-easy, even in the face of certain death.

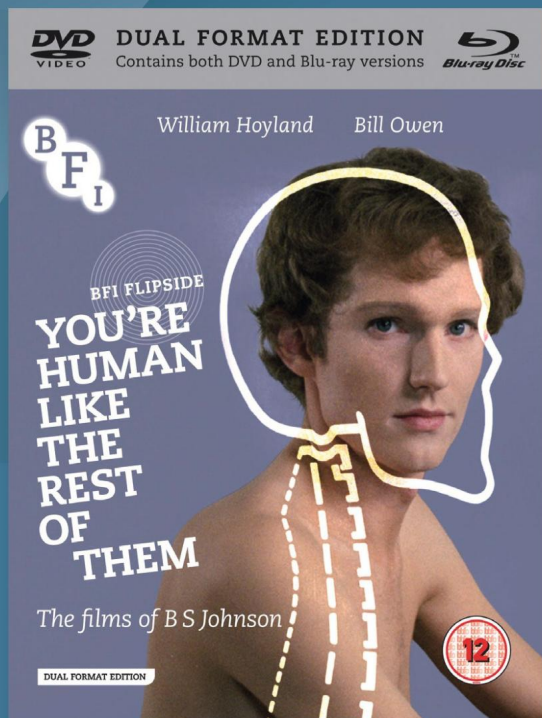
McBride is an underrated filmmaker with an unusual career arc. He began, precociously, with the ingenious, ultra low-budget *David Holzman's Diary* (1968) – cooked up, like *Breathless*, with his frequent collaborator L.M. Kit Carson, who also co-scripted Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984); and he seems to have ended, for the time being, with a musical tele-biopic about Meatloaf (*To Hell and Back*, 2000) and work on the series *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005). The 1980s offered him a shot at commercial success with *The Big Easy* (1986) and *Great Balls of Fire!* (1989), both fine, spirited films. But it's *Breathless*, along with *David Holzman*, that will win him lasting cult status among cinephiles.

Oh, by the way, Wikipedia tells me that *Breathless* is a remake of a 1960 French film of the same name, directed by someone named Godard. Being a completist film nerd, I checked it out for the benefit of *Sight & Sound* readers. It's not half as good as this one, I tell you. And its ending, by comparison, is so weak – cool and ironic to a fault. How much better it would have been if Jean Seberg could have run to her guy, screaming: "Michel, I love you, Michel!" And if Jerry Lee Lewis could have battled it out with Philip Glass on the soundtrack. ☺



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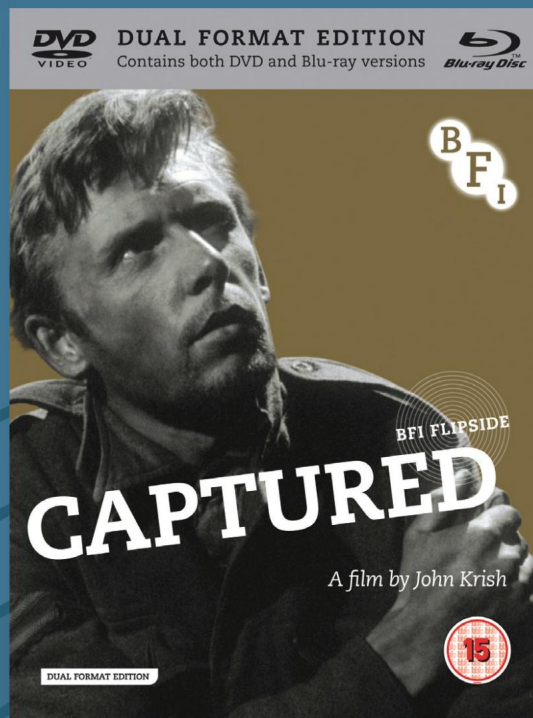
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